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COLONIALISM, EDUCATION, AND GABON: AN EXAMINATION OF THE
SELF-TRANSLATION OF GABONESE CITIZENS IN THEIR POSTCOLONIAL
SPACE THROUGH EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE

A Thesis Presented

By

MOUSSAVOU FROY BATSIELILIT

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of

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Comparative Literature

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ABSTRACT

COLONIALISM, EDUCATION, AND GABON: AN EXAMINATION OF THE SELF-TRANSLATION OF GABONESE CITIZENS IN THEIR POSTCOLONIAL SPACE THROUGH EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE.

SEPTEMBER 2016

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Gabon's educational model, mode, and language of instruction are similar to that of France. Likewise, the official language in Gabon remains French. The similarities between both countries, as a result, have continued to perpetuate and reinforce the indirect, or direct, influence of French culture in Gabon. The resemblance also contributed to the inability of Gabon to create an independent identity from France. As a result, Gabonese citizens are self-translating and rewriting themselves as an extension of France while simultaneously censoring half of their identities from the narrative of nation.

To understand the current situation, I investigate education and the language situation in Gabon and relate them to the field of Translation Studies in terms of the latter's concepts. The thesis begins with a historical background of Gabon. The discussion then shifts to analyze the connection between language and power, and its use during French colonialism in Africa. The importance of language and power is in turn linked to education, resulting in an analysis of Gabon and France's educational systems and materials. The issues of education, language, and identity are discussed so as to determine the influences on Gabonese citizens' identities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. AN INTRODUCTION TO GABON’S POPULATION, LANGUAGE, AND EDUCATION LANDSCAPE.....	10
III. LANGUAGE AND POWER.....	41
IV. EDUCATION	72
V. LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND IDENTITY	101
VI. CONCLUSION.....	121
APPENDICES	
A. EDUCATIONAL ACRONYMS AND LANGUAGE FAMILIES	133
B. ETHNIC POPULATIONS, FOREIGN LANGUAGES, AND SCHOOL ENROLLMENT IN GABON	135
BIBLIOGRAPHY	139

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Chart of the Educational Systems in France and Gabon.....	79
2. Educational Acronyms.....	133
3. Present ethnic groups in Gabon with population numbers	135
4. Foreign African Languages in Gabon.....	136
5. School enrollment in Gabon from 1945-1972	137

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Map of Gabon, taken from Google Images	15
2. European Languages in Gabon	23
3. Middle East. & Asian Languages in Gabon.....	24
4. FRANCAFRIQUE- documentary of France's neocolonialism	129

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As education is generally regarded as the key to national development, proposals for nation building have included the reform of inherited educational systems which were erected to maintain the colonial social order and which continue to function to foster neo-colonial dependency, promote elitism, and inadequately prepare individuals for living successfully in their communities and in a rapidly changing world. Paramount among these reform proposals has been the call to re-appropriate African indigenous educational traditions that were marginalized or dismantled during colonial rule in Africa.
Yatta Kanu¹

Going through the Gabonese educational system during my younger years, I never questioned or analyzed the status of our education. Likewise, learning Gabon's history did not incite a need to question the relationship between Gabon and Europe nor to investigate if deeper marks of Gabon's colonialism remained. Now that I have matured, I have realized that Gabon's history and current situation is much more complex and interconnected to its ties with Europe, specifically France. I have observed the French influence still present in Gabon and the lack of an independent identity for the Gabonese: a lack present in language and education. These observations have led me to question which influence and ideals are taught to the Gabonese population. Are Gabonese pupils' identities impacted by the remnant of French influence? What and how are Gabonese citizens self-translating themselves? Is Gabon's educational model French-centered? Is there even a French presence in Gabon? These are but a few thoughts that arose during my contemplation of this subject. Answering and investigating them will provide a better

1. Yatta Kanu, "Tradition and Educational Reconstruction in Africa in Postcolonial and Global Times: The Case for Sierra Leone," *African Studies Quarterly* 10 (2007): 65.

framework for understanding Gabon, which can only be done by first understanding the history of the country.

The name Gabon comes from the word *gabão*, meaning “hooded cloak” in Portuguese.² The name was introduced when a Portuguese explorer, Lopo Gonçalves, came into contact with the *Estuaire du Gabon* (Gabon’s Estuary), whose water comes from the Komo and Mbeï rivers, and likened the estuary to a “hooded cloak.” Gabon’s name encapsulates its rich history with Europeans and ironically highlights its position as an extension of Europe, and of France to be exact. This concept of accepting the foreign gaze and practice and embracing them as part of the self is evident in various aspects of Gabonese history, including in education and language. This has allowed European, namely French, influence to persist in the country and (in)directly impact the population. This French presence is still evident today.

The presence of Portuguese explorers, as well as various others such as the Dutch and British, remained in Gabon until France gained control of the country in the nineteenth century. Like most African countries, Gabon was colonized, specifically in the late 1830s by France. The colonization policy used by France centered on linguistic, cultural, and economic imperialism. Of the three, linguistic imperialism was paramount. The language of the colonizers, French in this context, was imposed on the citizens, resulting in the diminishment of local Gabonese languages. The plurality of local languages was a direct result of the multiplicity of ethnic populations in Gabon. The migration of Bantu people during the twelfth century and prior and the presence of forest

2. James Barnes, *Gabon: Beyond the Colonial Legacy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 10.

people in Gabon are reasons for the array of Gabonese languages and ethnicities. The peripheral position ascribed to local languages afforded French colonizers the opportunity to impose their ideals and values on Gabonese citizens. One such ideal was the prestige and esteem of the French language. The French language remains the official language of Gabon today.

Embracing all things French resulted in the adoption of various institutions, including the French education system. Since the 1970s Gabonese citizens have attempted to reorient and redefine who they are by seeking the Africanization and Gabonization of educational materials. Although changes have been incorporated in both systems, there are still great similarities: large similarities both in structure and in educational content. Although Gabon has made strides toward autonomy and self-representation in its educational model and materials, the facets of mode and language of instruction still remain similar to those of France.

The reasons for the similarities are numerous, including the remnant of French influence, as well as political and cultural rationales. First, the power and esteem associated with the French language during colonialism and thereafter contributed to the hesitancy of the government to completely eradicate and alter the education sector. Second, the fear of restricted access to French institutions coupled with the granting of *bourses* (scholarships) for Gabonese students to study in France contributed to the lack of change. Third, the single political party in Gabon and the close ties of the government to France, which according to some bordered on neocolonialism, further complicated the issue. Gabon's second president, Omar Bongo, instituted a single political party in 1968 that resulted in the undemocratic system that allowed him to stay in power for 42 years

(cf. the maximum of eight years in the U.S). During Bongo's 42-year reign, he publicly disavowed a relationship with France but a close tie between the two countries existed. The close connection between Gabon and France led to multiple economically beneficial agreements, some of which led to the supply of educational materials and the presence of France in Gabon's education sector. By allowing France to provide textbooks, Gabon in turn failed to fully develop its educational publishing industry.

Fourth, the absence of a dominant local language in Gabon led to a lack of motivation to radically change the education system and language of instruction. Gabon has 40 or more local languages in addition to foreign languages. In addition, the country boasts 30 or more ethnicities/citizenships. The fact that French serves so many functions, two of which are as first language and *lingua franca*, also dissuaded and discouraged any attempts to introduce a new language as the official language and medium of instruction.

The lack of progress in the development of the educational system is a result of both Gabon's inability to initiate substantial changes and the still visible impact of France in Gabon. As a result of these issues, the educational system has continued to perpetuate and reinforce the direct and indirect influences of French culture in Gabon's education. The lack of progress in democratizing and redefining the education system has continued to underline the inability of Gabon to develop an identity and self-identification devoid of French influence but hybrid in nature. The lack of change has contributed to the persistent academic presence of France in Gabon. The result has been that Gabon indirectly portrays itself as a continuation of France, at least academically. These issues are the focus of this thesis.

This thesis is unique in its attempt to intertwine the educational system and linguistic situation in Gabon with theories of power, hybridity, self-translation, and identity formation. This research aims at analyzing the effect of education and language on the identity formation of Gabonese pupils. Similarly, it aims at determining the ways in which Gabonese citizens are self-translating themselves through the avenues of language and education. The investigation and development of this hypothesis will provide much needed reasons for why Gabonese citizens continue to use institutions previously imposed upon them. Insights from this thesis can also lead to investigations of other former colonies and their reluctance or inability to change, correct, and/or renounce their former colonizers' control upon their view of personhood by way of education and language. Education is a great vehicle for identity formation and social success (progress). Thus by investigating its relevance and significance in the context of Gabon, we in turn investigate the identities of those being educated.

Similarly, language has been shown to contribute to the formation of one's identity. Thus by studying the impact of the French language and the reasons behind its continued use in Gabon, we in turn investigate how the Gabonese see and represent themselves. The focus on power, hybridity, self-translation, and identity formation will provide us with a varied perception of the Gabonese population in their postcolonial space. This in turn sheds light of the bigger problem of whether or not Gabon remains an extension of France as a result of its educational system, educational materials, and language.

The theoretical framework for this thesis focuses on self-translation, hybridity, identity formation, and the relationship between power and language. The original

definition of self-translation, introduced by Anton Popovič, is defined as “the translation of an original work into another language by the author himself” (1976, 19). The definition has since evolved. I use the term abstractly in this thesis to refer to the self-representation of Gabonese citizens. The definition of hybridity discussed in this thesis is one relevant to the fields of Translation and Postcolonial Studies. Homi Bhabha first defined hybridity, or cultural hybridization, as an “interstitial passage between fixed identifications [that] opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (1994, 5). In this thesis I use a loose and modern definition of hybridity, which is the appropriation and adaptation of norms from one group by another. For the concept of identity formation, I use theories and studies from Harke A. Bosma (2006), Pierre Bourdieu (1997, 2000), Norman Fairclough (1989), Lyda Lannegrand (2006), Rebecca A. Michell (2012), Nailah Nasir (2012), Bonny Norton (2000, 2013), Stephen Peck (2012), Robert Roeser (2012), and Christine Weedon (1997). Lastly, for the framework of language and power I use concepts from Johan Galtung (1971), Robert Phillipson (1989, 1992), Herbert Schiller (1975), Thomas Schwietring and Johannes Weiß (2008).

The thesis is divided into six chapters, including this introduction. In Chapter 2 I provide a historical background of Gabon’s population, language, and education system. As an introductory section, it is used to outline the past and current situation in Gabon. The chapter addresses the three periods of Gabon’s history: before, during, and after European colonization. Understanding the history of Gabon in relation to population, language, and education helps to better situate the present of the country.

In Chapter 3 I discuss the interconnectivity of language and power and the use of language for the purpose of colonialism by France. I argue that language itself has power and power cannot be established without language. I highlight the way in which France used its language policy during colonialism with the goal of complete assimilation of the French language and culture through education. By doing so France invented power in the French language. By forcing the French language and education on Gabonese inhabitants, France was able to create an extension of itself in language and culture in Gabon.

Chapter 4 is used as a comparative section analyzing the educational models of France and Gabon. I briefly examine specific educational materials to determine similarities and dissimilarities between Gabon and France. I demonstrate that the foundations of both educational models are still similar and educational materials are eerily identical for secondary education. I show that most materials, with the exception of books used in civic and elementary classes, are produced in France by French publishers. Finally, I discuss reasons that Gabon does not produce its own material for secondary education and attribute the situation to international agreements, subsidies, and book supplies provided by foreign entities. In addition, the chapter details the lack of secondary teachers, newly acquired independence, low monetary reward associated with education, and unsatisfactory student performances as further reasons for the lack of an educational publishing industry in Gabon.

I argue that the absence of self-representation in educational materials and the similarities in educational models mean that there is a French presence in Gabon. This presence induces Gabonese citizens to self-translate themselves and the nation as an

extension of France academically. In this thesis I am using self-translation abstractly to refer to the self-representation of Gabonese citizens. I suggest that, as a result of education, Gabonese citizens are projecting for themselves an identity that is influenced by France. I highlight the multifaceted nature of the identities of Gabonese citizens and discuss the various influences that impact on identity in Gabon, especially those from their own ethnic groups. The influence of a French centered education is one such influence.

Chapter 5 integrates the earlier materials by discussing the relationship between education and language and how they affect identity formation. I argue that an individual's identity cannot be understood separately from his/her language and the social institutions that shape it, in this case education. I reiterate that the use of French and the continued use of an educational model similar to that of France induce Gabonese citizens to translate themselves into being French identified and projecting themselves as an extension of France academically. I discuss the fact that identity is multifaceted and can be hybrid in nature, thus too complex for it to be simplified. This means that although there is French influence in Gabon's education and languages, elements specific to Gabonese cultures and linguistic heritage also form the basis of Gabonese identities.

Chapter 6 is devoted to a brief conclusion and summary of the arguments presented throughout the thesis. Gabonese citizens translate themselves as a continuation of France, and are in turn erasing part of themselves and their identities from education. They self-censor themselves from the narrative. Self-censorship (a concept used in Translation Studies) is the phenomenon of a translator silencing him/herself during the act of translation. In her book *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (2007),

Maria Tymoczko explains it as “the tendency to conform willingly to dominant discourses and standards” during the act of translation and to self-impose limitations.³ In this discussion, I use the term abstractly to refer to the involuntary erasure of an aspect of Gabonese identities in secondary education by Gabonese citizens. In addition to summarizing the thesis, I discuss the implications of my observations and findings as they relate to Gabon. Furthermore, I discuss the limitations of the research and data introduced in the thesis, and the implications for Gabon and other nation-states with similar backgrounds. Finally, I discuss areas for future research.

3. Maria Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (Manchester, UK; Kinderhook, NY: St. Jerome Pub., 2007), 257.

CHAPTER II

AN INTRODUCTION TO GABON'S POPULATION, LANGUAGE, AND EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Since we were considered as French “a part-entière,” nothing but French was taught. The whole curriculum was based on France and anything that was French, whereas Comorian, our mother tongue, was never considered to be a suitable medium of instruction.
Abdourahim Said Bakar⁴

The arrival of Europeans contributed to the changing social, economic, and political climate of Gabon. The changes that resulted from European interactions with Gabonese citizens have partially contributed to the current population, language, and education system in the country. These changes have had significant consequences. Prior to the presence of Europeans, the relationship between local groups was relatively cordial.⁵ As stated by Nicolas Métégé M’Nah, a Gabonese historian who wrote a book that compiles an extensive amount of research on Gabon from prehistoric times to the twentieth century, lineage and community supposedly held more importance than individuality. The introduction of European products, languages, the Atlantic slave trade, a favoritism system, and a formalized educational system contributed to the shifting environment in Gabon.⁶ The relationship between groups, already strained, became increasingly tense; individuality and wealth became more respected than community; and

4. Abdourahim Said Bakar, “Small Island Systems: A Case Study of the Comoro Islands,” *Comparative Education* 24 (1988): 181-91.

5. Nicolas Métégé M’Nah, *Histoire du Gabon : des origines à l’aube du XXI^e siècle* (Paris: L’hammatan, 2006), 30-36. Whether or not the statement is true is unknown because of the limited knowledge of Gabon’s history prior to the fifteenth century.

6. The history of Gabon expressed throughout this chapter is taken from Nicolas Métégé M’Nah (2006), James F. Barnes (1992), and Annelies Hickendorff (2014). The depictions provided are sentiments espoused by the authors and, because of the limited knowledge of Gabon’s history, cannot always be corroborated.

a strong desire for European goods overshadowed ethnic pride.⁷ Likewise, languages became infused with Europeans loans words, and the French language and culture led to a change in the socio-cultural and political environment of Gabon.

For these reasons, in this chapter I briefly summarize the history of Gabon before and after European contact. Next, I provide past and current information about population, language, and education in Gabon. This will be done in order to establish the context for subsequent chapters and to help position Gabon in the current postcolonial landscape.

The history of Gabon before the presence of Europeans in the fifteenth century is not well documented, nor is common factual information readily available. Scholars, however, including James F. Barnes (1992) and Métégé M’Nah (2006) have agreed that two groups were present during that time, the forest and Bantu peoples.⁸ It is believed that forest people inhabited Gabon first. The reasons for their presence and how they arrived in Gabon are still uncertain, but according to Annelies Hickendorff (2014), forest people arrived from central Africa in order to escape the migration of Bantu people.⁹

The period of migration of Bantu people is uncertain. Some scholars cite a few decades before Europeans; others like Gabonese historian Frederic Meyo Bibang cite the twelfth century A.D; and others like Métégé M’Nah believe that Bantu speakers arrived in Gabon in the eighth century or before.¹⁰ As reported by Métégé M’Nah, numerous

7. Métégé M’Nah, *Histoire du Gabon*, 80-84.

8. The ethnicities of forest people in Gabon during this period are not widely known. Three groups are noted as being present: Baka, Babongo, and Bakoya.

9. Annelies Hickendorff, *Gabon (Connecticut: The Globe Pequot Press, 2014)*, 4.

10. Métégé M’Nah, *Histoire du Gabon*, 32.

remains prove that Bantu groups inhabited Gabon during the fifth century.¹¹ The reasons for the arrival of Bantu people in Gabon are not well known. In his book *Gabon: Beyond the Colonial Legacy* (1992), James Barnes alleges that “adverse climatic conditions, the decline and fall of traditional central African kingdoms, and Islamic incursions across the Sahara” as possible reasons for the presence of Bantu people in Gabon.¹²

Oral traditions, linguistic data, and a few cultural data suggest that the settlement of Bantu people in Gabon took place from the north, east, and south.¹³ Those who believe that migration started in the north identify the region of Lake Chad as the origin.¹⁴ Historian Frederic Meyo Bibang subscribes to this viewpoint.¹⁵ Meyo Bibang believes the Peul moved from the north to the south-central regions of Africa, then later shifted to coastal regions. Following this route, Meyo Bibang indicates that the Peul people were the first Bantu group in Gabon, and the ancestors of Gabonese citizens.¹⁶ Others believe migration originated in the south of the continent, specifically the Shaba province of Zaire.¹⁷ These migrations led to the occupation of specific areas of Gabon by specific groups. These groups lived in diverse regions for a while prior to migrating to other locations in the country. After years of migration, eventually Bantu groups outnumbered forest people. Recorded by some sources, intermarriages and continuous migration

11. Métégé M’Nah, *Histoire du Gabon*, 33.

12. James Barnes, *Gabon: Beyond the Colonial Legacy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 6.

13. Métégé M’Nah, *Histoire du Gabon*, 30-33.

14. Barnes, *Gabon*, 6-8.

15. Barnes, *Gabon*, 6-8.

16. Barnes, *Gabon*, 6-8.

17. Barnes, *Gabon*, 6-8.

contributed to the increase in the population of Bantu groups and the decrease in the number of forest people.

Socially, Gabonese people were organized into clans based on lineage and special groups such as mixed people and slaves. The institution of slavery was in effect before the arrival of Europeans. People were enslaved for various reasons, and slaves included prisoners of war, those punished for a crime, or simply those owing money. Slaves were tied closely to their owners. Slaves worked for their owners, obeyed them, served them completely, and could be put to death if their owners died or for any whims of their owners.¹⁸

Politically the populace was organized on the basis of “state villages,” a term coined by Métégé M’Nah. “State villages” were small politically independent units, each consisting of an actual village and surrounding territory with recognized boundaries. Each village had a chief, usually the oldest person of the group. On occasion villages were ruled by a diarchy system. This happened when members of two different clans both held leadership positions. In a case of a diarchy, a close collaboration in the administration of a village was necessary. In addition, councils of elders existed to assist chiefs. Economically local groups survived on subsistence farming, hunting, and fishing. Each village also had artisans, those dedicated to the production of everyday items such as fabrics, baskets, and religious items. Trading was another economic activity among various ethnic groups. The arrival of Europeans in the fifteenth century altered these social, political, and economic systems.¹⁹

18. Métégé M’Nah, *Histoire du Gabon*, 39-44.

19. Métégé M’Nah, *Histoire du Gabon*, 54-60.

The lack of innovations, the Atlantic slave trade, and the introduction of European products affected the social, political, and economic structure in Gabon during the fifteenth century and after. Socially the Gabonese populace's dynamic changed from a focus on communities and groups to individual interest and wealth. The local groups were no longer concerned with the prosperity of the whole, only with the prosperity of the self. In order to attain this, personal relationships had to be formed with Europeans, especially with Portuguese and Dutch explorers, to gain favor. The arrival of Europeans also seemed to have created a system of favoritism for specific languages and ethnic groups. With the introduction of Europeans products, the desire for foreign items in Gabon increased. One such product was clothing. Local people embraced European clothing while rejecting their own. Languages also evolved to include European loan words.²⁰ The de facto economic system became trade between locals and Europeans. By trading with Europeans, locals were able to increase their wealth and prestige in the community. In order to trade one had to be in good standing with the traders. This led to the newly instituted system of favoritism discussed above. Local groups fought each other for the acceptance of Europeans and the ability to trade with them. Trade was not limited to goods; it included trading Gabonese slaves. Although Gabon had a small population, the slave trade was still a lucrative business. Trade remained the main economic activity until the nineteenth century when France introduced a currency based economy in the country.

Politically, the influence of local chiefs and elders diminished with the arrival of Europeans. The introduction of new products and the increase in trade created additional

20. Métégé M'Nah, *Histoire du Gabon*, 82-83.

competition among local groups, which led to further power struggles and ultimately the demise of some ethnic groups. The favoritism indirectly established by Europeans also created a new political hierarchy.²¹ These social, economic, and political changes were the beginning stages to the developing identities of Gabonese citizens and paved the way for French control and influence. They contributed to the current population, language, and education in Gabon.

Population

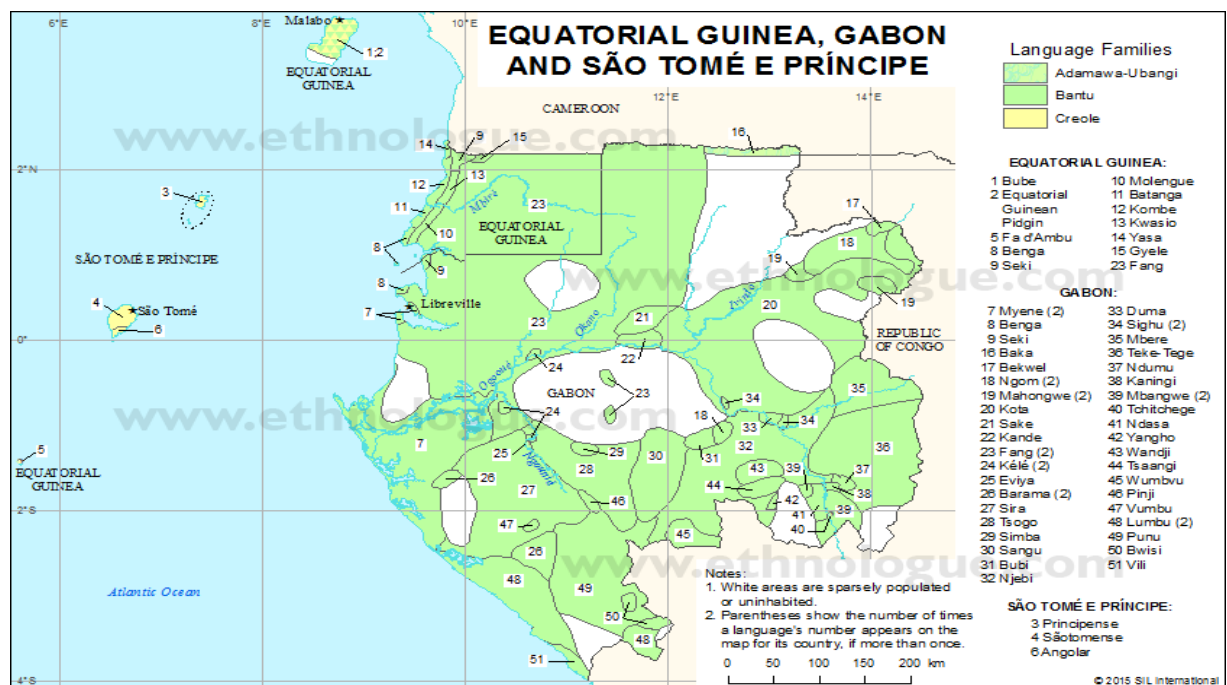


Figure 1: Map of Gabon, taken from Google Images

The arrival of European and later U.S. explorers, traders, and missionaries in the fifteenth century and afterward contributed to the redistribution of the Gabonese people. Several migrations of various groups of Bantu people from the east and north of Africa led to the repopulation of Gabon's coasts. Barnes indicates that, "Although it remains difficult to specify dates for these movements, the evidence suggests that major shifts in

21. Barnes, *Gabon*, 10-15.

population occurred between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.”²² The largest migration to take place during this period was that of the Fang ethnic group in the province of Woleu-Ntem and the estuary. This movement was only surpassed by the arrival of Portuguese explorers during the fifteenth century.²³ The Fang came to Gabon from Cameroon, one of its neighboring nation-states. The migration of the Fang later spread to other parts of Gabon and accounted for one-third of the population in 1992, making it the largest ethnic group in the country and the reason for the agricultural prosperity of Woleu-Ntem.²⁴

In addition to the Fang, there were nearly 50 other ethnic groups in Gabon. The 50 ethnic groups belonged to eight major language families: Myéné (Benga), Kota, Duma, Tshogho, Mbété, Punu-Eshira, and Téké.²⁵ Myéné speakers occupied the estuary and maritime areas of the Ogooué basin. Included in this language family were the Mpongwé, who resided in the estuary region; the Orungu in the Ogooué delta in Port-Gentil; the Nkomi in the Fernan Vaz; and the Galoa, Enenga, and Adjumba in the Lambaréné and southern lakes areas. The Benga (who disappeared in the nineteenth century) resided in the estuary alongside but in isolation from the Mpongwé. Although included in the Myéné speaking family, the Benga spoke a language exclusively their own. The Séké and a few Benga occupied the coastal region between Libreville and Cocobeach alongside the Fang. The Ndiwah (stated to have been the first group to have

22. Barnes, *Gabon*, 102-3.

23. Barnes, *Gabon*, 102-3.

24. Barnes, *Gabon*, 103.

25. Barnes, *Gabon*, 104.

contact with Europeans) integrated with Mpongwé groups due to their low numbers, a decrease forced by a Dutch massacre of the group in 1698.²⁶

Punu-Eshira speakers inhabited the central region of the Como River as well as the west and south of the Woleu-Ntem. Included in this language family were the Okanda, who resided in the Ogooué-Ivindo basin; the Nzabi (who arrived from Congo in the eighteenth century) in the N'gounié and Ogooué-Lolo; and the Bapounou (who reportedly came from Zaire, where they were known as Bayaka, in the seventeenth century) who resided near the towns of Mouilla and Tchibanga. The Eshira, linguistically and culturally similar to the Bapounou, resided in the south-central region of Mandji and Fougamou. Bakota speakers were divided into two large groups spread between the northeast and southeast of the country. The Shamaye, Shake, Mahongoué, and Ndambomo inhabited the northeast. Several Mbété groups, the Obamba and Adouma, resided around the Lastoursville and Koulamoutou regions of the southeast. The Obamba and Adouma were linguistically and culturally similar to the Bakota. Just as the Fang were vital to the prosperity of Woleu-Ntem, the Bakota were important in the cities of Makokou and Mékambo due to their working the iron and ore deposits.

In addition to being home to the Bokota, Mékambo city was also home to forest people who preferred isolation. According to Barnes (1992), Gabon's total population of forest people was estimated to be 2,000 in the twentieth century.²⁷ Batéké speakers lived in the southeast region of Gabon, around Franceville and near major uranium and manganese deposits. Those part of the Batéké family group the (Mitsogho, Masango, and

26. Barnes, *Gabon*, 105. See also *Encyclopedia of Africa*, Vol. I by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (2010).

27. Barnes, *Gabon*, 105.

Apindji) lived in the central region of the country, including the upper N'gounié and du Chaillu massif. Not only were Batéké speakers in Gabon, they were also found in the Congo Republic. Until the adjustment of the borders of French Equatorial Africa in 1922, Batéké territory was part of the Congo Republic.²⁸

The adjustment of borders after the end of World War I contributed to the multiplicity of languages and ethnicities in Gabon. Gabon's current borders were redefined after the allocation of German colonies in Africa to other states, as a result of the peace terms of World War I. Thus various ethnicities like the Batéké and Bakota found themselves now living in Gabon instead of neighboring nation-states. As French colonialism sought to take advantage of Gabon's resources, the people in Gabon believed that developing a single, unitary identity would help them preserve much of their land. Thus, they decided to call everyone Gabonese. There were, however, still strife and division among the groups, especially between the Fang and the Myéné. The strife between groups, detailed by Barnes, was exacerbated by the French presence in Gabon.²⁹

The French occupation of Gabon brought with it a change in leadership that dictated which ethnicity was to be in power and altered the economic structure of the country. Leadership in Gabon had been obtained by kinship or birthright. When France took over, this pattern shifted to French administrators having absolute control while allowing Gabonese people to retain local authority. An example of this shift is demonstrated in Chapter 2, when Gabriel Léon M'ba, Gabon's first president, was appointed to a leadership position by the French administration. The increasing authority

28. Barnes, *Gabon*, 105.

29. Barnes, *Gabon*, 106.

and power of France in Gabon contributed to the decrease of the authority of indigenous leadership and the economic infrastructure. As the French language and culture were imposed and a new French way of life was introduced, many young Gabonese left rural areas to migrate to cities in order to participate in the new system. Traditionally, Gabon was an agriculture society with a bartering system that served as currency. This changed as France installed a currency-based economy. The increase in migration to urban areas widened the existing internal divide among the people due to a desire for actual wages.³⁰

Today Gabon's population is much more varied than in the past yet the country is still densely populated. Bordering the Atlantic Ocean at the Equator and located between the Republic of Congo and Equatorial Guinea, Gabon has a total area of 267,667 sq km. The country is administratively divided into nine provinces: Estuaire, Haut-Ogooué, Moyen-Ogooué, Ngounié, Nyanga, Ogooué-Ivindo, Ogooué-Lolo, Ogooué-Maritime and Woleu-Ntem. The country is currently estimated to have 1.71 million inhabitants, both foreign and native. Local citizens represent 85% of the population. Foreigners in Gabon represent 15% of the population, approximately 21,000 people.

According to the 2005 *Ethnologue* report, 1,000 citizens from Lebanon, together with people from Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, and other Arabic countries, constitute a substantial number of Arabic speakers in Gabon.³¹ There are approximately 11,000 French nationals, and the population of English speakers in Gabon equals 800.³² In addition to French nationals and English speakers, individuals from Cameroon,

30. Barnes, *Gabon*, 106-7.

31. M. Paul Lewis, "Gabon," *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* 16 (2009). Accessed April 25, 2014, <http://archive.ethnologue.com/16/web.asp>.

32. "Joshua Project," accessed March 15, 2015, <http://joshuaproject.net/countries/GB>.

Equatorial Guinea, and West Africa constitute 12% of the Gabonese population. There are also nationals who are from China, United Arab Emirates, and other Asian and Middle East countries. The foreign population in Gabon comprises volunteers, business vendors, diplomats, refugees, and migrants.

Gabon has a current male population of 870,345 and a current female population of 864, 398. Roughly 42.1% of the population is between 0-14 years old, 20.3% is between 15-24 years old, 29.7% is between 25-54 years old, 4.1% is between 55-64 years old, and 3.8% is 65 years old and above. The median age for the total population is 18.6 years old. The population growth rate is 1.96%. The birth rate is 34.82 births per 1,000, and the death rate is 13.11 deaths per 1,000.³³ As reported in the 2010 census, the urban population equals 86% of the total population. The most populated and economically prosperous cities in Gabon are Libreville, Port-Gentil, and Franceville.

Language

Gabon's language policy is an adaptation of the one enforced during the colonial period. After formal colonization by France in 1839, the French language was mandated as the sole official language in Gabon (in 2012 English was adopted as the second official language). Local languages were used solely for religious teaching by missionaries from the 1840s until the mid-1930s, and were used as familial languages among the local population. French was and is still being used in administration, government, and education. Except for a newly added affidavit incorporated in 1998 that states that Gabon

33. "CIA World Factbook," accessed April 25, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gb.html>.

“endeavors to protect and to promote the national languages,”³⁴ the rest of the policy is extremely close to the colonial policy of the nineteenth century.

There is a multiplicity of languages in Gabon that has contributed to its language diversity, local and foreign. Gabon used to be described as a multilingual country in view of its endogenous and exogenous multilingualism. As stated by Jules Mba-Nkoghe, the definition of endogenous multilingualism refers to languages that native populations (*Gabonais d’origine*) speak. On the other hand, exogenous multilingualism refers to the languages that immigrant and migrant linguistic communities (*Gabonais d’adoption*) speak.³⁵ This mode of describing the languages in Gabon has changed in the last 14 years. Gabon is now considered to be a country with linguistic diversity, rather than a multilingual nation-state.³⁶ Linguistic diversity refers to a presence of multiple languages in a geographic space, whereas multilingualism refers to an equal status ascribed to all languages in a specific country. Although the Gabonese population is generally bilingual and often multilingual, the country itself is monolingual with French being the official language. For this reason, Gabon’s status has changed from a multilingual country to a country that possesses language diversity.

There are, at minimum, 40 local languages or 62 living speech forms or varieties (*parlers*) in Gabon. The languages are divided into two language families: Bantu and

34. Hugues Ndinga-Binza, “English in French-speaking African Countries: The case of Gabon,” in *The Study and Use of English in Africa: A Review*, ed. A.E. Arua et al. (Univ.-Bibliothek Frankfurt am Main, 2009), 11.

35. Hugues Ndinga-Binza, “Gabonese Language Landscape: Survey and Perspectives,” *South African Journal of African Languages* 27 (2007): 96-116.

36. This new definition has been promulgated by the following scholars: Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir (2001), and Moyo (2002, 2003).

“Pygmy.”³⁷ Bantu languages form the largest family, while “Pygmy” languages are smaller. The concept of 62 living speech varieties was introduced by Kwenzi-Mikala (1988, 1990, 1998). The concept includes both dialects and languages, and has been used by Raponda-Walker (1932), Guthrie (1953), Jacquot (1978), and Blanchon (1994). Kwenzi-Mikala originally divided the 62 speech forms into eight language groups or language units in 1988 (groupings were based on mutual comprehension). In 1998 Kwenzi-Mikala restructured them into ten language groups. Kwenzi-Mikala’s language groups are divided as follow: Mazuna, Myene, Mekana-Menaa, Mekona-Mangote, Membe, Merye, Metye, Membere, Mekana, and Baka. Because of the concept of mutual intelligibility, scholars (Hombert, 1990; Emejuly and Nzang-Bie, 1992) have criticized Kwenzi-Mikala’s classification by stating that he is ignoring language adaptation and language intuition. His classification however was the most helpful at the time and served as a source of reference.

Gabon’s inability to nationalize local languages has contributed to the confusion regarding which speech forms constitute a language and which constitute a dialect. The fact that some of the speech forms in Gabon are shared by neighboring nation-states (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Congo-Brazzaville) further complicates the situation. Certain vernacular languages found in Gabon have large speaking populations, while others are on the brink of extinction. Although some of the languages have numerous speakers, no language has a dominant

37. There is no consensus on the number of languages in Gabon. Some sources state 40, others 41 (Gordon 2005, Grimes 1996a), and a few 49. Due to the widely used number of 40, I have elected to use this number. I use “Pygmy” here because it is the most widely used term in reference to languages spoken by forest people. The term “Pygmy” in and of itself is offensive when referencing actual groups.

presence in the country. The absence of a dominant and widely spoken native language in Gabon has contributed to the absence of a local language being recognized and adopted as part of national policy and custom.

In addition to local languages, foreign languages likewise are part of Gabon's language repertory, including African, American, European, and Asian languages. A report from the *Laboratoire des Sciences Humaines et de la Dynamique du Langage* (LASCIDYL- Laboratory of Humanities and Language Dynamics, 1998 and 1999) cites eight foreign languages in Gabon. Six of the languages are European (including French), one of the languages is from the Middle East (Arabic), and one is an unidentified Creole.³⁸ The foreign languages have been introduced by businessmen, missionaries, volunteers, refugees, and migrants who have interacted with native populations in Gabon. In some cases the foreign languages have more speakers than some of the native languages. Figure 2 and 3 below show the country of origin of foreign languages and the cities where they are spoken in Gabon.

Addendum 3: European Languages in Gabon		
Country of Origin	Languages	Mostly spoken in
Argentina	Spanish	Libreville
Brazil	Portuguese	Libreville
Canada	English, French	Libreville
Equatorial Guinea	Spanish	Libreville, Oyem, Bitam
France	French	Libreville, Franceville, Port-Gentil
Ghana	English	Libreville, Port-Gentil
Germany	German	Libreville, Port-Gentil
Italy	Italian	Libreville
Netherlands	Dutch	Gamba, Port-Gentil
Nigeria	English	Libreville, Port-Gentil
São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde, Angola	Portuguese	Libreville

Figure 2: European Languages in Gabon³⁹

38. Ndinga-Binza, "Gabonese Language Landscape," 102.

This list is not inclusive due to the absence of information about Asian languages.

39. Ndinga-Binza, "Gabonese Language Landscape," 106.

Addendum 4: Middle Eastern and Asian Languages in Gabon

Country of Origin	Languages	Mostly spoken in
China	Chinese	Libreville, Omboué
Japan	Japanese	Libreville
Lebanon	Arabic	Libreville, Port-Gentil, Franceville
Malaysia	Malaysian	Mayumba, Ndindi, Tchibanga, Lambaréné
Mauritania	Arabic	Libreville, Port-Gentil, Franceville, Lambaréné, Mouila, Oyem
Morocco	Arabic	Libreville, Port-Gentil

Figure 3: Middle East. & Asian Languages in Gabon⁴⁰

Although several European languages are spoken in Gabon, the most widely used European language is French. The French language has five statuses in Gabon: it is a foreign language, a second language, an official language, a mother tongue and initial language, and a local and national language.⁴¹ For some the French language is simultaneously a foreign language and a second language. The postcolonial generation in Gabon not only learned French in the educational system but also through the introduction of the language by their parents: those raised during the colonial period. French is also Gabon's official first language. The language is used in all aspects of public life in the country, including education, politics, administration, and business. Certain scholars believe that French was kept after independence for practical reasons. The Gabonese Constitution not only recognized French as the official language but also stipulated that French was to serve as "the sole medium of instruction in the national

40. Ndinga-Binza, "Gabonese Language Landscape," 106.

41. Hugues Ndinga-Binza "From Foreign to National: A review of the status of the French language in Gabon," *Literator: Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics, and Literary Studies* 32 (2011), 135-50.

educational system, and as the language of business, in civil administration and the media.”⁴²

For many of the present generation growing up in Gabon, French is the mother tongue and initial language. For many in urban areas, French is increasingly becoming the only spoken language. Various reasons have contributed to this shift from foreign or second language to initial language, one of which is the increase in interethnic marriages. Couples engaged in mixed marriages often have different vernacular languages. In order to effectively communicate with each other, French is used as a “link” language. When children are born in environments such as these, French becomes the only communicative language in the house rather than the parental African languages. In addition to being a mother tongue, French is also described as the national and local language. Due to the diverse population found in Gabon and the escalation of urban migration, French has become the “link” language. The lack of a dominant vernacular language at the national level has made French the *de facto* local and national language.⁴³

Aside from French, English is Gabon’s second official language as of 2012. Though recently adopted, no true reform has taken place to implement and impose its presence in the country. Prior to English becoming an official language, English was primarily used in the northern province Woleu-Ntem. English was introduced to Gabon during three distinctive periods. The first point of introduction was through British imperialism toward the end of the eighteenth century and lasted until the 1830s.⁴⁴ English

42. Ndinga-Binza “From Foreign to National,” 142.

43. Ndinga-Binza “From Foreign to National,” 136-45.

44. Ndinga-Binza, “English in French-Speaking Africa Countries,” 5. My resource for this information is entirely based on Ndinga-Binza’s account. According to Ndinga-Binza, a specific date as to when Great Britain arrived in Gabon is unknown.

was used as a *lingua franca* during the slave trade by Gabon and Great Britain. The interaction between local populations and British explorers spread the language to Gabon's indigenous society, resulting in its adoption by some local kings. The second point of introduction of English was through missionary evangelism. Evangelical missionaries, mostly from the United States, spread the English language throughout various provinces. The last point of introduction of the English language occurred after the World War I.⁴⁵ Prior to World War I, Woleu-Ntem was a German colony. After the end of World War I, the German administration gifted the province to England as a reward for winning the war. Control of the territory was later seized by France.⁴⁶

As a result of these interactions, Gabonese native languages have borrowed English words. These appropriations are discernible in vernacular languages such as Yipunu (*Uresi* for "rice"), Yilumbu (*Ingesi* for "English"), and Fang (*Tawël* for "towel").⁴⁷ At present, English is becoming more popular because of trade and import of American goods, the positive image of the United States, and the global *lingua franca* status ascribed to the language. The presence of English in Gabon can be seen in mass media, on clothing, on buildings, as part of people's names, and in education.

Education

Gabon's education pattern changed from being informal and oral to highly institutionalized and French-centered. Prior to 1844 Gabon relied on an education system that incorporated practical, local practices such as home making, oral culture, and

45. Ndinga-Binza states that German colonies were given to France and Britain after the end of World War II, however, the dismantling of German colonies took place at the end of World War I as evidenced in the Treaty of Versailles.

46. Ndinga-Binza, "English in French-Speaking Africa Countries," 1-8.

47. Ndinga-Binza, "English in French-Speaking Africa Countries," 8-9.

numerous others. The Bantu languages were solely oral in nature and lacked a written script. Everything was learned and taught orally. History was taught through fables, language was acquired through imitation and mimicry, and everything else was learned or taught through speech. During the beginning phase of colonization, the system of education included the use of African languages in the instruction of religion and practical arts. The absence of a recognized form of writing led to transliterations of several local languages by Christian missionaries.

The languages were transcribed into the Latin alphabet and used for Bible translations and catechisms in order to convert the Gabonese population to Christianity. The nineteenth century also found local languages being used for more general education in order to foster cooperation and ensure comprehension. The limitation of local languages solely to religion and Bible translations inhibited the growth of other types of literature and imposed the use of French and English in Gabon.⁴⁸ As the years progressed, a shortage of missionary teachers became an issue. The number of French Catholic missionaries decreased and thus they were no longer able to provide educational services to the local population. The decline of French Catholic missionaries resulted in the decline of their influence in Gabon. While the number of French Catholic missionaries decreased, the number of American Protestant missionaries increased and later declined as well.⁴⁹

The shortage of American Protestant missionaries contributed to the increase of French Protestant Missionaries, which led to more French presence in Gabon. Schools

48. David E. Gardinier, *Historical Dictionary of Gabon* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1981), 105.

49. Gardinier, *Historical Dictionary of Gabon*, 105-6.

controlled by American Protestants had a shortage of teachers. For this reason American Protestants requested assistance from France. The petition for assistance resulted in the complete surrender of entire mission fields to French Protestants between 1892 and 1913. Meanwhile, France was subsidizing Catholic mission schools. Although France was giving monetary support to Catholic missionaries, it did not try to regulate their educational model due to the concept of *laïcité*, secularism. Secularism is the absence of religious involvement in government as well as the absence of government involvement in religious affairs. This changed in 1883 with the introduction of a government decree. The decree mandated that schools dedicate time teaching French and that they only use French as the language of instruction. The mandated decree of 1883 and the acquisition of American Protestant schools significantly increased the influence of the French language as well as the imposition of French culture on Gabonese citizens' identities.⁵⁰

Despite the strong presence of religion in Gabon's education structure, secularization gradually gained ground. In 1905 France introduced the law of Separation of Churches and the State and decided to construct state schools in several towns of French Equatorial Africa, including Gabon, to be governed by the administration. In 1911 the French administration required mission schools to follow an official local curriculum but permitted the use of indigenous languages during religious teachings. The use of indigenous languages for the teaching of religion was aimed at encouraging Christianity and forming an indigenous clergy. The French administration simultaneously desired schools to promulgate the French language and culture while distinguishing the most

50. David E. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 8 (1974): 518-38.

talented for training as employees of the government. The administration wanted to have a somewhat educated population who would be able to serve as subordinates to French citizens and as emissaries between them and traditionally oriented African communities.⁵¹

The limitations of the educational system imposed on the Gabonese populace by the French administration resulted in a semi-literate public. The administration restricted education to the primary level and allowed Catholic and Protestant institutions to provide limited higher education. By limiting education, France wished to avoid the creation of a liberally educated population able to instigate anti-colonialist discourse and possibly spur anti-colonialist insurgency. The administration's goal of constraining education was further aided by a lack of funds and resources, both in France and in Gabon. During the mid-1930s limited resources were invested and supplied by the administration to support education, less than 1% of the colonies' budgets. Schools were inadequately equipped and staffed, which contributed to the high illiteracy rate.⁵²

After the introduction of reforms inaugurated by the Popular Front in France during the late 1930s, the administration sought to expand educational opportunities and to elevate the quality of instruction in Gabon. The Popular Front, an alliance of left-wing movements conceived between the two World Wars, included the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF, French Communist Party), the *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière* (SFIO, the French Section of the Workers' International), and the Radical and Socialist Party. The party won the May 1936 elections in France and until its dissolution

51. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 518.

52. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 519.

in 1938 instituted many reforms, which inspired change in French colonies. Expenditure for Gabon's educational system increased; the colony budget increased from 1% to almost 5% by 1946. Aid was no longer restricted to French Protestant and Catholic schools but was also allocated to non-French institutions. Irrespective of the changes taking place, the educational system remained completely French in instruction and curriculum. Whereas French prevailed and persisted as the sole language of formal education, local languages continued as religious languages.⁵³

During the period of decolonization after World War II, France decided to bolster the advancement of its overseas colonies by assimilating them into the Fourth French Republic. The Fourth French Republic began soon after the dissolution of the Third French Republic in 1946. In order to successfully integrate the colonies into the Republic, the administration donated a substantial amount of money between 1946 and 1959 for economic and social progress. Of the amount provided for social progress, two-third of the funds were used for health and educational facilities. The initiative, the *Fond d'investissement pour le développement économique et social* (FIDES, Investment Fund for Economic and Social Development), helped fund the construction of primary schools and a few secondary institutions. Likewise, *FIDES* paid half the amount needed for the construction of new mission schools.⁵⁴

Although the French administration provided monetary assistance for education in all colonies, in 1947 the financial responsibility for primary education shifted to individual colony budgets. Gabon devoted 19.6% of its budget to education. Secondary

53. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 519-20.

54. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 520.

education was still funded by France, and the administration spent 6.6% in 1950 and 7.5% in 1957 for education in all colonies.⁵⁵ The integration of colonies as part of the French Republic meant bettering conditions, economic and social, especially educational ones. The French administration's efforts, however, did not result in substantial improvements in the colonies. The lack of improvement resulted in Gabon relying on France for investment capital and budget subsidies. The dependence on France for funds also made Gabon's economy and social conditions vulnerable to French control, especially in education.

The post-war assimilation of French colonial territories led to the introduction of the metropolitan French curriculum into Gabonese schools. The language of instruction was, of course, French and at least half of the program in primary school was devoted to the French language and French culture.⁵⁶ After the war, secondary education in colonies became widely accessible. The French administration opened various *lycées* (high schools) and *collèges* (middle schools). *Lycées* lasted for seven years and *collèges* lasted for four years. The administration built twelve *lycées* and fourteen *collèges* in the colonies between 1957 and 1958. These schools were supervised by the French government, and exams were administered by the University of Bordeaux. Because of the influence of the French government in the school system, diplomas received by students from these institutions became valid in France and other French colonies.⁵⁷ Access to higher education, however, continued to be restricted. To rectify the situation, the French administration provided *bourses* (scholarships) for Gabonese students to attend

55. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 520-21.

56. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 521.

57. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 521-22.

universities in France. The number of students on scholarship in France prior to 1970 is unknown, but between 1971 and 1972 there were 560 Gabonese citizens on scholarships in France.⁵⁸ Although possibly an increase from previous years, it still was not a substantial amount.

Although access to education improved, the conditions of institutions in Gabon had not. The primary education system tended to be crowded, and teaching materials were few and often not adapted to the socio-cultural environment of students. Also, teachers in primary education were often not properly educated. As qualified teachers left for better paying jobs, less qualified instructors remained. A study done by Marc Botti and Paul Vezinet in Gabon in 1964 described the lack of education of teachers as follows.

Though certified, [teachers] have received only an embryonic pedagogical formation. A good number of these teachers were oriented towards teaching following repeated failures in other fields. Having little intellectual aptitude and very reduced pedagogical competence, their presence explains the average mediocrity of Gabonese primary education.⁵⁹

In addition to crowded classrooms, few teaching materials, and less qualified teachers, an increase in education cost contributed to poor education conditions. As a result, the country was dependent on foreign assistance. The culmination of these issues contributed to the decline of quality primary education, including high dropout rates, high numbers of repeaters, and poor student performances. Secondary education was much better. The majority of teachers were French nationals and educated. Classes were not as crowded and educational materials were available.⁶⁰ Despite the social progress made in education and the economy, the colonies were unable to sustain them once independence was

58. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 522-23.

59. Marc Botti and Paul Vezinet, "Enseignement au Gabon," *Société d'Études pour le Développement Economique et Social* 2 (1965) : 111-125.

60. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 529.

achieved. The initiatives proposed and enforced by the French administration in Gabon came to an end in 1960 once the Gabonese Republic obtained independence. In this instance, independence was gained as a result of events elsewhere in the French union rather than from dissatisfaction or insurgency to French rule in Gabon.⁶¹

Independence for Gabon was in name only, for the Gabonese government lacked funds and resources to be autonomous. The lack of self-governance led to a reliance and dependence on France and other nation-states for support of operations and future development, including education. Gabon's dependence on France was exemplified when the government initially only implemented education reforms proposed by France. Gabon adopted the same changes France made to its educational system during the Fifth Republic into its own educational system. The inability to be autonomous was further demonstrated when the government implemented educational reforms chosen by nation states in French Equatorial Africa under French sponsorship. The proposed educational reforms introduced by states in French Equatorial Africa occurred under a mutual policy.

France assisted the newly independent Gabon and other African states through a policy called *coopération* signed on October 1960. According to a 1966 report, *coopération* meant “for the African states the possibility of passing from formal independence to real independence; for France, the maintenance of important outlets, the extension of the French language and culture, and the international acclaim for its decolonizing work.”⁶² In lay terms, *coopération* was meant to further impose French language and culture upon the Gabonese populace, and to extend the French educational

61. Gardinier, “Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa,” 522.

62. Gardinier, “Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa,” 522.

model without the framework of colonialism. The claim that *coopération* would permit Gabon to move from formal independence to real independence, when French authority would be imposed and levied upon the masses, is a fallacy evidenced during the years after the acquisition of freedom.

Between 1960 and 1965 the French administration was involved in the construction of school buildings and in the preparation of educational materials for primary education. The French government also participated in the training of new teachers. Apart from the aid provided for primary education, France paid the majority of secondary education expenses. For example, the government recruited and paid teachers and built educational facilities. The support of France allowed for an increase in school enrollments in secondary classes. In addition to aid in primary and secondary education, the administration helped with technical, professional, and higher education in terms of facilities, operating funds, and French teachers.⁶³ Thus, Gabon never truly gained independence from France; it was autonomous only in name.

Cooperation also resulted in the creation of FESAC, *Fondation de l'Enseignement Supérieur en Afrique Central* (Foundation of Higher Education in Central Africa), on December 12, 1961.⁶⁴ FESAC trained teachers, technicians, and engineers. FESAC also allowed students from Gabon to take classes with other students in Brazzaville, Congo. Nonetheless, Gabonese students preferred to study in France. Students wanted to study in France because of the prestige of French education and the

63. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 523-25.

64. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 525-26.

political issues in Congo.⁶⁵ France financially supported FESAC in every way, including building facilities, providing equipment, and providing teachers. Diplomas and certificates gained through FESAC were valid in France. The aid, however, did not come without a price. By funding and providing teachers, France was influencing education, thus deciding what should be studied and which perspective should be learned. The presence of France in African educational systems also meant the extension of its culture and language. The fact that many Gabonese students preferred to study in France rather than in Gabon or other African nations contributed to the expansion of France's authority and Parisian French in Gabon.⁶⁶

Prior to and because of the impending dissolution of FESAC in 1971, Gabon assumed responsibility for integrating and customizing its own educational programs. This was done with French financial assistance. The first institution opened under the new leadership with French assistance in 1970 was the University Institute of Technology. Later that year, the first classes in law and economics were offered at the Jean-Bedel University. In 1971 the *École Normale Supérieure* and the Institut Universitaire des Mines, de la Géologie et l'Agronomie (University Institute of Mines, Geology, and Agronomy) also opened. These latter two institutions opened without financial support from France; aid actually came from the Soviet Union and Romania. France did not provide monetary assistance until both the Soviet Union and Romania

65. On August 1963 the Youlou regime was overthrown, creating an instable political climate in Congo.

66. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 526.

helped.⁶⁷ Gabon's educational expenditures were financed by different donors but France remained its main sponsor.

In addition to FESAC, the *coopération* of October 1960 established other educational reforms and institutions. Before independence France held annual conferences for education directors from its colonies. After independence France held two conferences per year for the ministers of education of its former colonies. One conference was held in France and the other in an African city. These conferences were used to discuss education policies and implementations. Some of the research and planning institutions created during these conferences were IEDES, SEDES, IRFED, AUDECAM, and CAMES.⁶⁸ These institutions were meant to work with francophone African countries in order to facilitate education reforms. New teaching methods specific to African states were established in secondary education during the conferences. Another reform that came out of the conferences was the concept of the Africanization of secondary educational content. The idea was to "Africanize" subjects such as natural sciences, history, and geography in order to reflect the socio-cultural environments of pupils. The Africanization of educational materials started in the late 1960s in French Equatorial Africa and in 1967 in Gabon.⁶⁹

In an effort to individualize itself and to lessen its dependence on France and other countries, Gabon decided to Africanize the educational curriculum in the late 1960s. The Africanization of a curriculum "refers to the adaptation of the subject matter, teaching methods, and texts to the physical and cultural realities of the African

67. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 527.

68. Please see Appendix A for definitions of acronyms.

69. Gardinier, "Schooling in the States of Equatorial Africa," 534.

environment.”⁷⁰ Wanting to renew its educational system, the Gabonese government began to replace the study of French history and geography with the study of African and Gabonese history and geography. Although the study of African geography was always taught, it was never taught in a county-specific context. Thus, by focusing the study to Gabon’s geography and history, the government was attempting to repossess its identity and repudiate that of the former colonial power.

The process of Africanization showed that French was rarely the first language of students, a situation that often led to numerous hours of French language instruction and dissatisfactory performance(s) on the part of schools and students.⁷¹ In an attempt to redress the situation, in 1967 the government proposed to teach French as a second language and introduce African literature alongside French and other foreign literatures, so as to “former les élèves à leur propre culture,” meaning “to educate students to their own culture.” Following the proposed instruction of French as a second language and use of non-French literature, the policy was popularized by AUDECAM.⁷² AUDECAM suggested the use of both French and African works when teaching students. This proposition was adopted in Gabon in 1974 but failed to mature and was shortly thereafter dismantled.⁷³

The fear of restriction from French educational circles stopped the use of the reforms proposed by AUDECAM. Gabonese parents and students alike feared possible

70. John Ogden “The Africanization of the Curriculum in Gabon,” *The French Review* 55 (1982), 855-61.

71. Ogden, “The Africanization of the Curriculum in Gabon,” 856.

72. AUDECAM refers to *Association Universitaire pour le Développement de l’Enseignement et de la Culture en Afrique et à Madagascar*, University Association for the Development of Education and Culture in Africa and Madagascar.

73. Ogden, “The Africanization of the Curriculum in Gabon,” 856.

limitations associated with a radical Africanization of the educational model. Many despaired about the probable decline of the admission of Gabonese students to French universities. President Omar Bongo though in favor of educational reforms, was also fearful of a decline in quality if too many changes were implemented. Gabon wanted to make sure that Gabonese diplomas remained acceptable in France. The lack of institutions of higher education in Gabon during this period gave credibility to the angst and contributed to an amended reform in the late 1970s. The new reform accorded teachers freedom of choice of instructional materials. The choices permitted fell within specific guidelines provided by the ministry of education. The intended purpose of the choice of materials was to allow teachers the opportunity to redefine the French language, and to present Gabonese and African culture to pupils. The reform produced publications such as the *Anthologie de la littérature gabonaise* (Anthology of Gabonese Literature, 1978) and *Contes du Gabon* (Tales of Gabon, 1981), which reinforced the mission of the educational administration to foster Gabonese awareness of themselves and their culture.⁷⁴

The Africanization and Gabonisation of the language and curriculum failed to yield substantial results in relation to instruction materials in modern Gabon. The intention to restructure was an attempt to reverse the invisibility forced upon the country by France and provide an outlet for self-identification, but such a quest only resulted in limited success. Instruction materials in Gabon are mainly manufactured in France, in other African nations, and scarcely at all in Gabon. While materials of instruction have

74. Ogden, "The Africanization of the Curriculum in Gabon," 856-57.

truly failed to be “Gabonized,” African culture has been introduced in subjects such as literature and history.

Education in Gabon at present is tumultuous at best. Primary and secondary education have improved. More qualified teachers are being hired, and more teaching materials are available. Similarly, opportunities in tertiary education have increased. Since the 1970s multiple universities have been built in Gabon such as l’Université Omar Bongo (Omar Bongo Univeristy), l’Université des Sciences et Techniques de Masuku (Univeristy of Science and Technology of Masuku), and a few more private institutions. Students possess options for higher education in various fields at home and abroad. *Bourses* have steadily been provided for promising students but are granted on the basis of field and country of study. While opportunities have improved, the conditions in universities seemed to have remained the same. The state of facilities are undesirable, educational materials are lacking, and funding have not increased. Constant strikes by students and teachers occur in Gabon because of dissatisfaction with schools’ conditions and government leadership. Perpetual leadership changes have created an atmosphere of inconsistency and distrust, which has impacted the academic performance of students. Overall, as stated and demonstrated by Gabonese pupils and parents, the situation leaves much to be desired and no change seems to be in sight.

In this chapter, I have provided a brief summary of Gabon’s history. I have discussed the past and current population, language, and education of the country and how they were affected with the arrival of Europeans in the fifteenth century. Although the history of Gabon prior to the fifteenth century is not well documented, it is known that Gabon was a land inhabited by Bantu groups and forest people. The interaction

between both groups resulted in a mutual exchange of language and culture.

Intermarriages between groups and continuous migration contributed to the growing number of Bantu and the decreased presence of forest people. The social stratification during this period was based on familial lineage and individualized groups. The economy was based on land and trade. The political power was divided between chiefs and elders. The arrival of Europeans in the fifteenth century and after contributed to the shift in the dynamics of the local population, including language and education. The arrival of Europeans also contributed to the redistribution of Gabonese people. Similarly, the presence of Europeans was partly responsible for the multiplicity of languages in the country and the persistent presence of the French language. During this period, the educational system changed from informal and oral to highly institutionalized and French-centered. Although various European countries explored Gabon, French authority was the most influential. Through colonialism, France was able to extend its language and culture socially and academically. The academic, social, and political influences are still evident in Gabon today.

CHAPTER III

LANGUAGE AND POWER

Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation.
Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o⁷⁵

The colonization policy employed by France during the nineteenth century centered on linguistic, cultural, and economic imperialism. Of the three, linguistic imperialism was paramount to the success of French enculturation. The French administration ascribed power to the French language in order to successfully assimilate its colonies. The power invested in the French language during imperial rule translated into authority and prestige for those who could speak it. The mode of linguistic imperialism in this instance was successful for the extension of French control and presence in French Equatorial Africa. The French administration forged an image in French Equatorial Africa that mirrored itself in order to extend itself. This was especially true in Gabon.

The interconnectivity of language and power during colonial times still exist today. Investigating the use of language and power by France in French Equatorial Africa is essential to outlining the current position and power of the French language in Gabon. As indicated in chapter 2, various languages exist and are used in Gabon, but French remains the official language for various reasons, one of which is linked to colonialism. The educational model has partially changed but still slightly resembles the one first introduced during the colonial period. Diversity defines the population, natives and foreigners alike. The current landscape of Gabon reflects its history. Understanding the role of language during the colonial period helps to situate the present.

75. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind* (Heinemann, 1986), 9.

In order to situate the present, the past must be understood in all its complexity. For this reason, in this chapter I investigate the relationship between language and power, and, when effectively used, how it contributed to France's absolute control and policy of subjugation in Equatorial Africa. First, I discuss the relationship between language and power. Next, key terms and ideologies about imperialism as it related to French colonial policy are defined and explained. Finally, I provide a brief overview of the past and the current relationship between France and Gabon in order to establish the persistent presence of French authority in Gabon and demonstrate how language and power remain intertwined.

Ipso facto, language alone is powerful and power needs language. In their article "The Power of Language: A Philosophical-sociological Reflection" (2008), Johannes Weiß and Thomas Schwietring discuss the relationship between language and power. Weiß and Schwietring propose that in order for power to exist, language must be involved. They also postulate that the power of language lies not with the speaker but with language itself. Language itself has power which is appropriated and employed by its speakers. Weiß and Schwietring explain the connection between language and power as follows.

In a more narrow sense, this understanding of the "power of language" is a matter of the instrumentalization of language for the purpose of exercising power. The command of language itself becomes a means of power: as political rhetoric and demagoguery, as ideology and bedazzlement, as seduction through words, as "persuasion." This power of language extends from large political contexts, from the manner of speaking and thus also of thinking that dictatorships and totalitarian orders force upon dominated people, to the small scenes of everyday life, to the arts of seduction of advertising, the sales tricks of telephone marketing, or the menacing undertones at the workplace or in the family.⁷⁶

76. "The Power of Language: A Philosophical-Sociological Reflection," accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.goethe.de/lhr/prj/mac/msp/en1253450.htm>.

Here the important point relevant to this chapter is the concept that language and power are inextricably connected. Language *is* power and language *has* power. In order for power to exist, language has to be used to express and dictate the ideologies to be appropriated. To speak what some must hear and to declare what others must obey. Hence, language and power are closely connected. This concept is clearly evident in reference to colonialism and colonization, specifically the role of France in the African context. During colonization language was used as a means to carry out acculturation to French culture and to ensure a state of economic dependency; these factors will be discussed in detail below. Acculturation to French culture, language, and economic dependency was accomplished via imperialism.

The concept of imperialism used in this chapter refers to the definitions proposed by Robert Phillipson and Johan Galtung. In *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992), Phillipson discusses the spread and impact of the English language, particularly the ideologies imparted through English in Third World countries, and their consequences. Even though focused on English, the definition of linguistic imperialism outlined by Phillipson is relevant to French colonization in French Equatorial Africa. As defined by Phillipson, imperialism is a form of relationship by which one group and or society dominates another.⁷⁷ The domination of another is often asymmetrical and creates inequality visible in various sectors of a society. The manifestations of the aforementioned inequalities are evident in the economy, education, government, and other phenomena, which are considered subtypes in the overall arching theory of imperialism. In “Structural Theory of

77. Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 52.

Imperialism” (1971), Johan Galtung discusses the characteristics of imperialism in the framework of subjugation. Galtung posits that imperialism involves both intra- and international relationships between nations that result in the widening gap of inequality.⁷⁸ According to Galtung the characteristic of being a subtype and possessing subtypes guarantees that “dominance relations between nations and other collectivities will not disappear with the disappearance of imperialism; nor will the end of one type of imperialism guarantee the end to another type of imperialism.”⁷⁹ Galtung posits that imperialism comprises six subtypes: social, cultural, political, communication, transport, and economic imperialism. In this thesis I mainly focus on cultural, communicative, and economic imperialism. According to Phillipson, all subtypes are further categorized by four mediums: marginalization, penetration, fragmentation, and exploitation, with exploitation the most essential.⁸⁰ Exploitation is viewed as the most fundamental medium because of its ability to create unequal terms between the parties involved, which is necessary in order for imperialism to persist. Galtung’s theories are particularly relevant to Gabon.

In addition to possessing subtypes and mediums, imperialism operates as a binary system: center and periphery. Galtung further contextualizes imperialism by dividing the world into periphery and center, in which the periphery is dominated and the center is dominant. Galtung postulates that there are centers and peripheries among both the dominant and the dominated sectors of a culture. Such a culture, however, is

78. Johan Galtung, “A Structural Theory of Imperialism,” *Journal of Peace Research* 8 (1971): 81.

79. Galtung, “A Structural Theory of Imperialism,” 81.

80. Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 52.

asymmetrical because peripheries are exploited in both the centers and peripheries of the whole system. Elites, present in both the centers of whole system, are connected by mutual interests in all types of imperialism. The mutual interests shared by the elites are claimed in those spaces by language. In the context of a center and a periphery, the norms and standards are determined by those in a dominant center. The regulated guidelines are later appropriated by the elites in the periphery. The dominant center represents powerful entities and interests, whereas the peripheries characterize underdeveloped or developing entities.⁸¹

Simply explained, in the context of an imperial power the theory divides the world into two forces, the colonizers and the colonized. The colonizers as one of the dominant sectors dictate norms and standards. The colonized as the dominated sector represent the sector of appropriation of established mandates and of power. The elites in this group assimilate the decisions established by the colonizers into their society. Although there is separation between the dominant and the dominated, both groups possess power and weakness. Weakness and powerlessness, however, are much more exploited in both contexts by their dominants. Elites from both groups possess shared interests in both the dominant and dominated sectors of imperialism. Regardless of the dominated status of a periphery, it cannot lack self-determination if it is to survive. The division of the world by Galtung into center and periphery holds true in regard to French colonization. In that context, the center was France and the peripheries were the colonies. France determined the laws, and the colonies abided by them. Weakness was associated with those with no authority, and power was associated with the elites. In the case of the

81. Galtung, "A structural Theory of Imperialism," 81-117.

colonies, weakness was associated with those not able to adapt to the change of language and culture, and power remained with those able to assimilate easily. This all took place in the shifting environment of cultural, linguistic, and economic imperialism.

The definition of cultural imperialism that I use in this chapter is provided by Herbert I. Schiller. In *Communication and Cultural Domination* (1976), Schiller addresses cultural domination, how it operates, and how to oppose it. Schiller posits that cultural domination could not be understood apart from cultural imperialism. Relevant to this chapter, the vital point introduced is Schiller's definition of cultural imperialism.

The concept of cultural imperialism today best describes the sum of processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating Centre of the system.⁸²

In this chapter cultural imperialism thus refers to the structural requirements enforced and recommended by France to its colonies. Particularly, it references commercial products, media, educational materials, and institutions introduced. Cultural imperialism is thus firmly linked to communicative imperialism.

The concept of linguistic imperialism in this chapter heavily mirrors the definition of linguisticism proposed by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson. In a collaborative article, "Mother Tongue: The Theoretical and Sociopolitical Construction of a Concept" (1989), Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson discuss the concept of a mother tongue and the criteria necessary to define it. The article also defines linguistic human rights and details their connection to linguistic discrimination. According to Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, linguistic human rights are necessary to combat linguistic

82. Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 58.

discrimination evident in colonized nations. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson define linguisticism as “ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language.”⁸³ Through linguisticism a specific form of language becomes imperative in the distribution and acquisition of power and resources; thus the connection between language and power.

According to Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, linguisticism happens in various stages. On the one hand, it can be open; thus the intent is not hidden. It is conscious; those using it are aware of it. It is visible; it is evident to all. Finally, it is action oriented. On the other hand, it can be hidden. It can be unconscious. It can be invisible. Finally, it can be passive as a result of a lack of support.⁸⁴ Linguicism specifically occurs if priority is assigned to a specific language in certain context despite the presence of several languages. Also, it is evident when a dominant language is introduced and resources are not allocated for the continued existence of other languages.

Similarly, linguistic imperialism is the forceful transmission of a dominant language to other people. Robert Phillipson describes linguistic imperialism in relation to the English language as follows.

The dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages. Here structural refers broadly to material properties (for example, institutions and financial allocations) and cultural to immaterial or ideological properties (for example, attitudes and pedagogic principles).⁸⁵

83. Robert Phillipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, “‘Mother-Tongue’: The Theoretical and Sociopolitical Construction of a Concept,” in *Status and Function of Languages and Language Varieties* (New York: W. de Gruyter, 1989): 450-77.

84. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, “‘Mother-Tongue’: The Theoretical and Sociopolitical Construction of a Concept,” 450-77.

85. Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 47

Linguistic imperialism is a primary component of cultural imperialism, though it must be remembered that cultural dissemination can also take non-linguistic forms and can occur in translation. Linguistic imperialism is also central to social imperialism, which relates to the transmission of the norms and behavior of a model social structure, and these are embedded in language.⁸⁶

Although Phillipson's application of the concept relates to the English language, the definition describes linguistic imperialism for French colonization contexts.

Finally, economic imperialism in this context refers to the possession of economic influence and power by one country over another. Similarly, it refers to a deliberate or implied policy in which a country makes another dependent in order to gain and/or have access to resources in the subordinate country. All three subtypes of imperialism detailed above apply to French colonization in French Equatorial Africa, specifically the actions and consequences of their implementations in Gabon. For example, linguistic imperialism was enforced through the colonial language policy, and cultural imperialism was pushed through education policies. The mechanisms used ranged from the forceful demands based on the installation of French as the sole medium of instruction and language to financial dominance displayed by economic sovereignty. Hence, it can be concluded that France used linguistic, cultural, and economic imperialism in its attempt to colonize Gabon.

A concrete and explicit illustration of one mechanism employed by France for linguistic and cultural imperialism is its colonial language policy in education. According to Eyamba G. Bokamba, "The most important piece of legislation that shaped the evolution of the French colonial language policy in Africa was the metropolitan

86. Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 53-54.

ordinance of Villers-Cotterêt, issued in 1539 by King François I.”⁸⁷ The ordinance of Villers-Cotterêt, decreed by François I and mainly written by Guillaume Poyet, demanded the use of the French language for all official legislations, contracts, and legal acts in articles 110 and 111. It is to be noted that the ordinance was not aimed at all colonies nor mainly about colonialism; it was introduced to reduce the misunderstanding of laws.

Articles 110 and 111 are written as follows.

We wish and order that [judicial acts] be drawn up and written so clearly that there be neither ambiguity nor uncertainty, nor the possibility of ambiguity or uncertainty, nor grounds for asking for interpretation thereof.⁸⁸

The policy further stated that,

because so many things often happen due to [poor] understanding of Latin words used in decrees, we intend that henceforth all decrees and other proceedings, whether of our sovereign courts or others, subordinate and inferior, or whether in records, surveys, contracts, commissions, awards, wills, and all other acts and deeds of justice or of law, that all such acts are spoken, written, and given to the parties [concerned] in the French mother tongue, and not otherwise.⁸⁹

The ordinance not only pushed other languages and dialects in France into peripheral positions, but simultaneously afforded the state the ability to create a specific form of “French.”

In 1634 Cardinal Richelieu created the French Academy to regulate the French language and elevate its prominence and esteem at home and abroad. The desire for a single dominant form of the French language, although initially meant for France alone,

87. Eyamba G. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies in Africa and Their Legacies,” in *Focus on Language Planning: Essays in honor of Joshua A. Fishman 3* (1991): 177.

88. “Ordonnance de Villers-Cotteret,” accessed January 18, 2015, <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?dateTexte=20110726&cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006070939>.

89. “Ordonnance de Villers-Cotteret.”

extended to French colonies as well during the nineteenth century. Denis Turcotte states that on July 14, 1826, decree No. 14, Article 8, dictated by French governing bodies stipulated the sole use of French in the education of school girls in Saint-Louis, Senegal. The article states, “La langue française sera seule employée par les élèves.”⁹⁰ This directive was later succeeded by Decree No. 95, introduced in October 18, 1848, declaring the replacement of Arabic in Senegal in favor of French as a result of a lack of available interpreters.⁹¹ The lack of adherence to the directive and the popularity of Arabic schools prompted French governing bodies to introduce an additional ordinance on June 22, 1857. Decree No. 96, Article 5, mandated teachers to provide additional French classes to pupils of 12 years or older: “Les maîtres d'écoles musulmanes seront obligés de conduire ou d'envoyer, tous les jours, à la classe du soir (soit celle de l'école laïque, soit celle des frères) tous les élèves de 12 ans et au-dessus.”⁹² The introduction of Article 5 failed to promote the effective use and to increase the popularity of French, which on February 28, 1870 resulted in the establishment of eleven additional articles. The ordinance acknowledged French as a compulsory language for both teachers and students, and ordered it as a necessary tool for the continuation of Arabic schools in Senegal. Demonstration of fluency was required and the inability to speak French resulted in the dismissal of students from schools and a forceful enrollment in a government or Catholic institution.⁹³ The forceful requests and mandates of the

90. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 178. Translation: Students will only use the French language.

91. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 179.

92. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 179. Translation: Muslim school teachers will be forced to drive or send, every day, to the evening class (either secular or religious schools) all students aged 12 and above.

93. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 179.

ordinances were meant to result in absolute assimilation to French rule and the French language. The French government intended to use the imposition of the French language in education as an avenue for total acculturation and as a gateway for the establishment of power. Language in this context was a means to gain power.

The inclusion of French to the exclusion of Arabic in schools was motivated by three distinct factors: the government's responsibility, a distrust of religion and the concept of *laïcité*, secularism, and a belief that education ensured effective assimilation.⁹⁴ The French believed that the education of French citizens and colonies needed to be handled by the French Republic. This perspective was further exacerbated by the distrust of religion and the conviction that church was the “enemy of reason, the stronghold of conservatism, and an obstacle to development and progress.”⁹⁵ This sentiment was a legacy of the French Revolution. For this reason, any organization with religious affiliations could not be entrusted with the task of educating any children, specifically African children from whom absolute appropriation and assimilation of French culture and life was required.

Likewise, the introduction of the 1905 law of the Separation of Churches and the State contributed to this perspective. The law emphasizes the absence of religious involvement in government affairs and the absence of government involvement in religious affairs. This is easily visible in the ordinance of 1922, which stated, “General education must be carried out in French. The Koranic schools and catechist schools are

94. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 181.

95. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 187.

authorized to provide exclusively a religious education in the vernaculars. Such schools are not considered as institutions of public education.”⁹⁶

Finally, the notion adopted by the French administration that education provided an avenue for acculturation and conformity led to the exclusive adoption of French in schools. This was clearly stated by E. Chaudié, Governor-General of French Equatorial African colonies. Chaudié strongly believed that through education, and only education, could French culture and language be acquired. Chaudié summarized his view in an 1897 memorandum as follows.

L'école est, en effet, le moyen d'action le plus sûr qu'une nation civilisatrice ait d'acquérir à ses idées les populations encore primitives et de les élever graduellement jusqu'à elle. L'école est, en un mot, l'élément de progrès par excellence. C'est aussi l'élément de propagande de la cause et de la langue françaises le plus certain dont le Gouvernement puisse disposer. Ce ne sont pas, en effet, les vieillards imbus des préjugés anciens, ce ne sont pas même les hommes faits, pliés déjà à d'autres coutumes, que nous pouvons espérer convertir à nos principes de morale, à nos règles de droit, à nos usages nationaux. Pour accomplir avec succès cette oeuvre de transformation, c'est aux jeunes qu'il faut s'adresser, c'est l'esprit de la jeunesse qu'il faut pénétrer et c'est par l'école seule, que nous y arriverons. C'est vous dire, Monsieur l'Administrateur, quelle importance j'attache au développement de l'instruction publique, à la diffusion de la langue et des idées françaises et au bon fonctionnement des écoles.⁹⁷

School is, indeed, the surest means of action that a civilizing nation has to develop its ideas and gradually introduce them to primitive populations. School is, in short, the quintessential element of progress. It is also an element of propaganda for the [French] cause and the French language, and the more certain route that the government has access to. It is not, in fact, old men full of old prejudices, it is not even grown men, already given into other customs that we can hope convert to our moral principles, our laws, our national customs. To successfully accomplish this work of transformation, it is the youth that must be addressed, it is the spirit of the youth that must be penetrated and it is only via school that we will get there. All this is to say, Mr. Administrator, that I attach great importance to the development of public instruction, the dissemination of the French language and French ideas, and the proper functioning of schools. (My translation)

96. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 181.

97. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 181.

Thus the acquisition of French would result in an increase in French speakers and, by extension, the expansion of France. Similarly, language gained through education would result in the increase of French power and influence in colonies.

Contrary to the promotion of French, local languages were relegated to familial and religious use. The introduction of local languages in administration and education was rejected because of the belief that it would have impeded cultural assimilation. A Decree of 1911, Article 4, No. 1207 states, “L’emploi des idiomes locaux est rigoureusement évité.”⁹⁸ Not only were local languages believed to restrict French enculturation, they were also cited as a tool for racial division, and “[local] languages were seen as perpetuating racial and cultural differences between the colonized and the colonizers.”⁹⁹ Thus in order to create a fictitious atmosphere of equality, but in fact actually creating cultural homogeneity, the French administration elected to impose the acquisition of French in lieu of the adoption of local languages. The Administration elected to create a new way of life — a very French-centered way of life in which language and power were connected.¹⁰⁰

The idea of education functioning as a gateway for assimilation was further sustained by Chaudié’s successor as Governor-General, Amédée William Merlaud-Ponty. Ponty declared the importance of education as a colonial tool in correspondence written in 1910.

L’école est le meilleur instrument du progrès ; c’est elle qui sert le mieux les intérêts de la cause française et qui en transformant peu à peu la mentalité de nos

98. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 186. Translation: “The use of local languages is completely rejected.”

99. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 182.

100. Michael Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

sujets nous permettra de les acquérir à nos idées sans heurter aucune de leurs traditions. Nul n'ignore en effet que l'étude du français est le remède le plus efficace qui puisse être opposé au fanatisme et l'expérience nous apprend que les musulmans qui connaissent notre langue sont moins imbus de préjugés que leurs coreligionnaires qui ne savent que l'arabe.¹⁰¹

School is the best instrument of progress. It is what is in the best interest of the French cause and which, by gradually transforming the mentality of our subjects, will allow us to win them over to our ideals without offending any of their traditions. Everyone knows in fact that the study of French is the most effective remedy against fanaticism, and experience teaches us that Muslims who know our language are less imbued with prejudice than their coreligionists who know only Arabic. (My translation)

This viewpoint summarizes the directives given to French administrators in French Equatorial Africa. Although the examples provided are specific to Senegal, these precedents nonetheless apply to Gabon. The directives demonstrate the desire of the French Republic to assure the increase of French schools so as to multiply opportunities for habituation. Similarly, they show the wish of France to create colonies in its image by using language as a tool for influence and power.

This desperate need for total appropriation of all things French has been likened to Europeans wanting to conquer the world. Various scholars (Morgenthau 1964; Crowder 1968; Lokulutu 1982) believed France entertained a similar quest as the *White Man's Burden*. The 1700s concept of the *White Man's Burden* espoused by Europeans held that it was a duty, or rather a "burden," to care for other "inferior" races and peoples of the earth. Using this analogy, France's colonization policy was created with the viewpoint or fiction that Africa was a burden to be weighted and conquered through linguistic assimilation, which automatically promoted cultural and economic assimilation.

101. Bokamba, "French Colonial Language Policies," 183.

It also contributed to the effective use of language to gain power. As Eyemba Bokamba writes, it was “education à la française,” or better stated, “life à la française,” which resulted in the gain of power and control by France via the imposition of the French language.¹⁰²

As demonstrated in the directives and statements espoused by General Merlaud-Ponty, language was pivotal for the spread of French culture. Language was the perfect propaganda vehicle for the continuation of French power and influence. Not only was it essential for the spread of the French presence, it was an important factor in the quest for the control and subjugation of local people, culture, and resources by French officials. Language via education allowed France to “transform” and bend locals to its customs, laws, and moral principles. Although at times the administration claimed that it wished only to introduce (i.e. impose) French culture without alienating people from traditional customs and ideals, this was not the case. By targeting the youth during the colonization and assimilation effort, France attempted to influence and ultimately alter the very identity of the population of its colonies. While identity is far too complex to simply be replaced due to the hybridity of selfhood,¹⁰³ France tried and succeeded to influence the self-image of its colonies.

By so doing, the French administration was able to gain and hold power. The acquisition of French by the colonies resulted in an increase in French speakers and, by extension, the expansion of France. The French language in conjunction with education was the gateway for French power in French Equatorial Africa, especially in Gabon. Just

102. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 183.

103. I will discuss the hybridity of selfhood in more detail in chapter 5.

as linguistic and cultural imperialism were similar throughout French Equatorial Africa, so was economic imperialism.

Economic sovereignty, as part of economic imperialism in French colonies, was reinforced with the imposition of French education and language. In the correspondence of 1910, as introduced previously, Governor-General Merlaud-Ponty explained the link between education and the economy, and how beneficial it proved for France. He stated that instruction elevated the “appetite,” or power of consumption, and forced the colonized to work, which then served the interests of the administration. Merlaud-Ponty believed that by creating schools the French administration was in turn contributing to the increase of wealth in the country. Merlaud-Ponty also concluded that by promoting education the administration was establishing a better and trustworthy relationship with the colonies, which made them less likely to listen to other Africans. Merlaud-Ponty plainly articulated the relationship between educational institutions and work as follows.

Même si on n'envisage que le point de vue commercial de notre colonisation, il faut reconnaître que l'instruction sert les intérêts de la Métropole plutôt que de leur nuire. Ainsi que je l'ai dit, l'instruction en transformant le goût de nos sujets augmente aussi leurs appétits, c'est-à-dire leur puissance de consommation, et les oblige à travailler. En créant des écoles nous contribuerons donc à l'accroissement de la richesse dans le pays et nous obtiendrons des indigènes une collaboration d'autant plus active que mieux renseignés sur nos intentions à leur égard (et) ils auront une confiance plus marquée dans notre autorité et deviendront moins dociles aux suggestions intéressées des marabouts ignorants ou fanatiques.¹⁰⁴

Even if one considers only the commercial point of view of our colonization, one must recognize that education serves the interests of the *Métropole* rather than harm them. As I said, instruction not only transforms the taste of our subjects but also increases their appetites, that is to say their power of consumption, and requires them to work. By creating schools we will contribute to the growth of wealth in the country, and will get even more active and better informed

104. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 185.

collaboration from the natives in regards to our intentions [colonization]. [And] they will have a greater confidence in our authority and become less susceptible to the concerned suggestions of ignorant or fanatical marabouts. (My translation)

General Merlaud-Ponty further articulates the point by stating,

Il me paraît d'ailleurs inutile d'insister encore une fois sur les avantages de tout ordre que nous pouvons avoir à recruter sur place les fonctionnaires nécessaires à notre Administration ou les ouvriers indispensables au développement de notre outillage économique.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, it seems to me unnecessary to stress once more the advantages of any order that we may have to recruit local officials necessary for our Administration or workers essential to the development of our economic tools. (My translation)

According to these statements, instruction was meant to increase consumption and desire for goods. This “appetite” for goods translated into a willingness to work and an increase in revenue for France too; the revenue was dispensed and controlled by France. Thus the end result was dependence on France for the continuance of the economy and wealth for the metropole. In order to gain economic control, the language barrier had to be overcome. This process of economic sovereignty would prove less challenging for the French administration if the populace whose resources were being taken had a false sense of closeness to the *Métropole*.

In the case of Gabon and other colonies, France was successful in its endeavor. Not only was the French language adopted by the people, but a distorted relationship developed between France and its colonies. Both the adoption of French and the semblance of closeness contributed to a successful implementation of economic imperialism. By demanding that only French be used in education and that French ideals, customs, and laws be enforced, the French administration was attempting to create a

105. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 185.

population that could be easily manipulated. Similarly, the attempt to increase the “appetites” of locals meant the desire to increase African labor and grow economic profits for France. Finally, the trust gained from local inhabitants as a result of the acquisition of French and the exposure to education meant a growing loyalty to colonial authority, thus resulting in locals “bending” to colonial rule and yielding power and control to France. In this case, a direct correlation between language and the gain of power greatly impacted economic assimilation in French colonies. According to Denis Turcotte (1981b), the success of the “economic assimilation” not only created a co-dependency between colonies and France but also resulted in the creation of a French economic community and the importance of the French franc as currency.¹⁰⁶ The establishment of a French economic community and a French franc further expanded French authority and power in the colonies, all beginning with the use and enforcement of French.

The Attempt to Shift from Colonialism to Cooperation

The French language was presented as a bridge to progress to Gabonese citizens while operating as a vehicle for the attainment of power and thralls by France. The rising presence and authority of France in French Equatorial Africa, specifically Gabon, was tied to the dissemination and acceptance of the French language and French culture. The insistence of the acceptance of all things French and the goal of economic power for France, however, changed in 1944. A shift from cultural, linguistic, and economic assimilation to cooperation, equality, and democracy ostensibly took place after the

106. Denis Turcotte, “Répertoire chronologique de la politique linguistique en Afrique francophone,” manuscript, 51.

Brazzaville Conference of January 30, 1944. The Brazzaville Conference was a gathering organized by General Charles de Gaulle in order to discuss the future of France's African colonies. The conference concluded with the acceptance of a piece of legislation, the Brazzaville Declaration. The Brazzaville Declaration of 1944 demanded the unification of all French colonies, the establishment of semi-autonomous assemblies for African colonies, equal rights, and the ability of African adults to vote in the French parliament. The declaration requested that public offices in colonies be filled by local representatives, and it called for the end of the abusive relationship between France and its colonies. Although willing to provide rights and participation, de Gaulle denied independence and autonomy by stating, "The aims of France's civilizing mission preclude any thought of autonomy or any possibility of development outside the French empire. Self-government must be rejected—even in the more distant future."¹⁰⁷ The specifics of the Brazzaville Declaration were later included in the French Constitution of 1946 after the end of World War II.

In the French Constitution of October 27, 1946, the administration vowed to recognize the individuality of its colonies and aid in the attainment of self-governance. The administration also affirmed the eradication of certain unfavorable conditions present in its colonies in order to create better environments. The legislature likewise proposed the disbanding of previous ideologies in regards to colonization in order to create equality for all. The constitution of 1946 details these changes as follows.

France forms with the people of overseas a union established on the equality of duties and rights, without racial or religious distinction. The French Union is composed of nations and peoples who put in common and coordinate their

107. Donald Anthony Low, *Britain and Indian Nationalism: The Imprint of Ambiguity 1929-1942* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 16.

respective civilizations to increase their well-being and guarantee their safety. Faithful to her traditional mission, France intends to lead the peoples she has taken in charge to self-administration and democratic management of their affairs. Setting aside all systems of colonization founded on arbitrary powers, France guarantees to all equal access to public functions and to individual and collective exercise of the rights and liberties proclaimed herein.¹⁰⁸

In addition to the aforementioned declarations, France bestowed the status of “overseas territories” to its African colonies. Such a status allowed colonies to create assemblies in which France retained voting power. The gain of a voice and power resulted in the demand for more autonomy. In response to the request, a legislative assembly and executive council passed the *Loi-Cadre*. The *Loi-Cadre* was passed in 1956 by the French National Assembly, granting France control over foreign policy, economic development, and intra- and international defense of its colonies, while allowing self-determination in other issues such as education and local politics.

The concept of equality and sovereignty of the French colonies, although pleasant, failed to yield significantly different conditions and policies. The practices established prior to 1946 remained in effect with limited reforms until independence. The educational model used in colonies after 1946 were the very same ones established during colonization. The French medium of instruction persisted and local languages preserved their positions as religious languages, with the exception of a few colonies.¹⁰⁹ Equal access to public functions and the exercise of rights and liberties as proclaimed in the constitution only became accessible upon successful attainment of and acculturation into French culture, education, and acquisition of French fluency. Thus, the correlation

108. Bokamba, “French Colonial Language Policies,” 197.

109. An example of such colonies is Senegal. During colonialism Arabic existed alongside French despite the French government’s vehement rules against it.

between the French language and the access to public function and rights for African adults clearly exhibits the interconnectivity of language and power during the colonial period.

The relationship established between language and power continued to be exercised by France until the decline of the French Fourth Republic in the late 1950s. The collapse of the French Fourth Republic in 1958, as a result of massive demonstrations in Algiers and a possible civil war in Algeria, revoked the rights and powers gained by the colonies. As a response de Gaulle called for a referendum in September 1958. The purpose of the referendum was to get guidance on the desirability of the formation of a *Communauté Française*, namely a French Community. The French Community was to act as an association for territories in which colonies had a broader autonomy. In addition to the formation of the new French Community, de Gaulle proposed three other choices: the status of an overseas territory, the status of an overseas department (part of the French Republic), and independence. Only French Guinea requested independence, whereas others chose to remain overseas territories and join the French Community. Those interested in the French Community joined in 1959. The republics under the Community became partially autonomous, meaning that France controlled specific areas of the administration of the colony. Gabon voted in favor of the partnership and temporarily became a semi-autonomous republic under the French Community, headed by Léon M'ba.

Gabon's decision to join the French Community resulted from the authority of France in the country and the affection of Léon M'ba for Charles de Gaulle. According to a government representative in January 1960, M'ba wanted to stay close to France even if

that meant giving up independence. The correspondence of 1960 details M'ba's motive as follows.

Out of consideration for the present insufficiency of [the] Gabonese administrative and technical *cadres*, [M'ba] would prefer, rather than total and nominal independence which would plunge the state into neo-colonialism, actual internal sovereignty which would permit him to prepare himself efficiently for his international responsibilities.¹¹⁰

Another Gabonese leader at the time, Paul Gondjout, espoused the same belief as that of M'ba by stating,

I affirm my belief that it would be premature now for Gabon to achieve total independence, for this would precipitate it irreparably into anarchy or, what would be even worse, into a sort of neo-colonialism.¹¹¹

The decision to join the Community also showcased the desire of Gabon to remain closely allied with its colonizer due to the realization of the nation's inability to be completely self-governing. France was heavily entrenched in the socio-political structure of the country thus guaranteeing its continued influence. The independence of Gabon and other colonies in the 1960s contributed to the disintegration of the French Community.¹¹²

The lack of self-determination for Gabon and other colonies, stemming from the reliance on France during colonialism, continued after the gain of partial autonomy and independence. The relationship between France and Gabon continued as a "partnership" after independence in 1960. Pierre Péan, a journalist writing in 1983, described the affairs between Gabon and France as follows: "Gabon is an extreme case, verging on caricature, of neocolonialism."¹¹³ His statement addressed the close ties between Gabon and France

110. Michael C. Reed, "Gabon: A Neo-Colonial Enclave of Enduring French Interest," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 25 (1987): 283-86.

111. Reed, "Gabon," 283-86.

112. Reed, "Gabon," 287-93.

113. Reed, "Gabon," 283.

during and after colonization. Similarly, his statement depicted the continuing connection between colonial authority and the French language.

Postcolonial relations between Gabon and France

In this section I focus on the postcolonial relations of Gabon and France in order to demonstrate their neocolonial relationship. Likewise, I use this section to reinforce arguments related to the power established through language acculturation during colonialism and to show it continued after the disintegration of colonization.

Gabon's prosperity in the 1970s and 1980s came from oil exports. Gabon is cited as one of the most prosperous countries in sub-Saharan Africa; but its population remains one of the poorest. According to Michael Reed, the wealth accumulated by Gabon was achieved at the expense of the population because of the lack of diversification in commerce and business.¹¹⁴ Big businesses and technology in Gabon were controlled by the French. *Le petit commerce*¹¹⁵ was and remains controlled by African nationals. The agriculture sector during this period remained overlooked, and ambition in work was restricted to government and administration positions. Gabonese citizens believed themselves to be above menial professions such as commercial work. They wished to work in office settings because of the prestige and esteem associated with working in professional environments.

In addition to dominating commerce and the economy, France heavily impacted the political and social climate of Gabon. One of the earliest examples of France's political power in Gabon after independence occurred in 1964, during the reign of

114. Reed, "Gabon," 285.

115. *Le petit commerce* refers to "small businesses" established throughout the country in markets, streets, and such locations.

Gabriel Léon M'ba (usually known as Léon M'ba). M'ba, Gabon's first prime minister and president, ruled with an authoritative form that resulted in the dissent of the Gabonese populace. The growing dissatisfaction with his reign translated in a *coup d'état* in 1964. French troops immediately reversed the *coup* and reinstated M'ba in power. The instantaneous response by the French military, flown in from Dakar and Brazzaville, proves beyond doubt the close relationship between the two countries and the dominance of France in Gabon. The response also contributed to the fear of retaliation against any opposition to the government and, according to Michael C. Reed, contributed to the temperate state of the nation.¹¹⁶

The immediate reaction by France could be attributed to its relationship with M'ba, who was believed to be a Francophile, and to the desire to assure the continuation of French authority in Gabon. Likewise it was meant to protect French interests threatened by the idea of the induction of a nationalist president. David E. Gardinier (1981) clarifies the reasons behind France's reaction.

The de Gaulle government may have intervened out of friendship for M'ba. But it definitely did so to protect French interests, particularly the uranium, which was essential for securing an independent [French] atomic force, and investments in petroleum, manganese, iron, and wood.¹¹⁷

The coup of 1964 also made the French much more assertive. Upon his return to power, M'ba acquiesced to the demands of France, not only because of his humiliation but also because of allegiance and loyalty to de Gaulle. One of the French demands was the induction of a pro-French technocrat as his successor. This demand secured the French monopoly on uranium and manganese in the country. M'ba's death in Paris in 1967

116. Reed, "Gabon," 293-5.

117. Reed, "Gabon," 297.

prompted the French government to support and groom a successor equally amenable to the interference and interests of France. Albert-Bernard Bongo, later named El Hadj Omar Bongo, became the chosen successor because of his ties to the southeast geography of Gabon, where uranium and manganese are located.¹¹⁸

The relationship between Gabon and France during Bongo's reign was one of mutual exploitation. France retained colonial authority and access to Gabon's resources, and Bongo obtained monetary aid and military assistance. A relationship between France and Gabon was once one sided but became rooted in neocolonialism. Reed believes that, "Bongo's ability to stay in power must be credited both to his own talents and to his pragmatic relations with France."¹¹⁹ With French assistance, Bongo shrewdly developed Gabon's natural wealth; this relationship however was not publicized. Bongo portrayed an image of being for the people and for the country. He represented the future, devoid of the stigma of neocolonialism, and portrayed himself as being above ideologies. Bongo publicly claimed alliance to no one, and he opened trade and businesses to those willing to invest in Gabon. Europeans, Asians, and other Africans welcomed the opportunity, and they monopolized business and commerce in the country. His image, however, failed to meet the expectations of the Gabonese people.

Bongo's form of government proved to be more authoritative and repressive than that of M'ba. In March 1968 he created the single legal party, *Parti Democratique Gabonais (PDG)*, in order to bring about changes in the government. He constructed the legislation for a single party in order to combat tribalism and nepotism, as well as to form

118. Reed, "Gabon," 297.

119. Reed, "Gabon," 287.

a government devoid of condemnation related to past transgressions.¹²⁰ Bongo clarified his decision to create the *PDG* as follows.

By the fault of certain of its militants and directors [Bloc Democratique Gabonais] had become no longer white as snow. It had, in effect, abandoned its role as the promoter of political union and had become a factory of nepotism.¹²¹

Bongo further made his political ideologies clear by stating,

Gabon is now well on its way, the hour of renovation has sounded. For me, that signifies the end of tribalism and of regionalism. Above all, it means the primacy of the economic over the political.¹²²

The party was created officially to fight tribalism and nepotism, and to remain free of the blemishes of the past, but in reality it was established to give absolute power to one individual and one group only: Omar Bongo and the *Parti Democratique Gabonais*.

Bongo's image of absolute freedom from France also proved false or at best only partially true. The use of Frenchmen as his security guard and advisers negated his assurances, while the presence of the French military belied his assertions. French paratroopers and air-force fighters remained in Camp de Gaulle, near Libreville, in order to assist the Gabonese military and protect the president, and most likely to protect France interests as well. Their presence emerged from Bongo's fear of his fellow citizens and his angst over the possibility of a *coup d'état*. His fear was such that his personal guard numbered 600-strong and consisted of Moroccan citizens and Gabonese soldiers with whom he shared an ethnicity. In addition to his personal guard, the intelligence unit

120. Reed, "Gabon," 300.

121. Reed, "Gabon," 300.

122. Reed, "Gabon," 300.

in Gabon was supervised by France. The fact that French interests increased also negated his denials.¹²³ Pierre Péan explained the French authority in Gabon as follows.

Always legal, the voice of the Gabonese people was smothered; always legal, the evolution of the political system was blocked: in the end, the coup attempt of 1964 succeeded only in installing a leader who was even more “orthodox”; always legal, French interests in Gabon were permitted to flourish.¹²⁴

Likewise, the persistent presence of Jacques Foccart, Secretary-General of the French Community, one of de Gaulle's closest confidants and loyal subjects, invalidated Bongo's claim of a non-existent French influence.

Although the French presence and influence remained in Gabon, France was not immune to demands and requests from its former colony. Partly because of the extent of French interests in Gabon, Bongo similarly had an impact on France's affairs. One example is evident during the change of power in 1981 in Gabon, during which it was believed that socialists ascending to power in France were too numerous. As a result, Bongo and members of *Le Clan* pressured for the removal of a socialist in favor of the installation of one with “Gaullist sympathies.”¹²⁵ *Le Clan*, a group of French and Gabonese citizens located in Gabon, monitored and influenced affairs believed to be beneficial to both parties. Another example of Gabon's influence in France took place in 1983. French journalist Pierre Péan had worked in Gabon in the Ministry of Finance and published a book detailing the history of *Le Clan* and its role in Gabon. Bongo opposed the publication of such a book and pressured France officials to stop its publication. He threatened them with the dissolution of future partnerships in favor of one with the

123. Reed, “Gabon,” 308.

124. Reed, “Gabon,” 308.

125. Reed, “Gabon,” 309-10.

United States. Although the book was published, French president Mitterrand, aware of Bongo's threats, sent his personal adviser François de Grossouvre to Libreville in order to repair relations.¹²⁶ The presence of de Grossouvre demonstrated the hold both countries possessed in relation to each other. This relationship lasted until 2009.

Conclusion

The intermittent six years between 2009 and the present have seen few governmental changes, shifts, or reforms. The relationship between Gabon and France remained unchanged until the death of Omar Bongo on June 8, 2009. His death brought both Nicolas Sarkozy and Jacques Chirac to Gabon; they were the only Western representatives at his funeral. France remains the biggest aid giver to and debt payer for Gabon. The official language of the country is still French. The French presence in Gabon remains strong. Approximately 10,000 French nationals still reside in Gabon. A minimum of 120 French businesses operate in Gabon. The French military, the sixth Marine Infantry Battalion, remains in Gabon. Various partnerships related to oil, mining, lumbering, and others, worth millions of dollars, have been created. It is also rumored that the habitual French control might have been evident during the August 2009 presidential election in Gabon. Many believe the election of President Ali Bongo, son of Omar Bongo, was fraudulent; he was not a favorite to win. His victory incited riots and demonstrations. Rioters set fire to the French consulate. A French oil company was attacked. Many in Gabon desired a change from the corruption and nepotism evident during the previous government. This win, however, guaranteed a repeat of the last 40 years. Despite all accusations France has denied having any involvement in the outcome

126. Reed, "Gabon," 309-10.

of the election. Aside from a congratulatory letter sent by Former President Sarkozy on hearing of the victory, France denied any other involvement.

The former relationship between the Gabonese and French presidents is, however, supposedly no longer one of mutual exploitation. According to President Ali Bongo, Gabon has no exclusive relationship with France. In an interview in 2009, Ali Bongo further explained as follows.

France is traditionally a strategic partner for Gabon, but there will not be an exclusive relationship between us. Gabon needs to open its doors to new investors.

I made several state visits, official visits and working visits since 2009 in South Africa, Australia, South Korea, United States, Italy, Japan, Morocco, United Kingdom, Switzerland and Singapore, Turkey. These visits were successful and we will continue on this path. Gabon is open to the world, Gabon is open for business, Gabon is open to innovation.¹²⁷

According to some, the public distance from France is a result of the investigation of alleged corruption in Gabon by former President Bongo. The public denouncement of an exclusive relationship with France by Ali Bongo, nonetheless, appears to be dishonest. France's involvement in Gabon since 2009 has yet to decrease; it actually seems to be increasing.¹²⁸ Whether or not the relationship between the former colonizer and its colony truly dissolves remains to be seen; however, the precedent established during colonialism still exists. The connection between language and power still dictates the relationship between Gabon and France.

Regardless of what the future reveals regarding the supposed distance between France and Gabon, it is clear that the linguistic, cultural, and economic imperialism

127. "France's Role in Gabon's Politics Unchanged," accessed January 22, 2015, www.voanews.com/content/a-13-2009-09-10-voa62-68806997/412533.html.

128. France's presence in Gabon is visible through its military presence, exclusive economic agreements, education, and media.

initiated by France has had far-reaching consequences, consequences still visible today due to various reasons. The language remains French as a result of the Gabonese government's inability to introduce overdue changes in the educational system or as the result of the esteem for the French language itself. The educational model introduced by France persists, with variations, for the same reasons listed above. The economic dependence, though more mutually beneficial now than during colonialism, still impacts adversely on Gabon. The power ascribed to the French language has contributed to its continued presence in Gabon. The French language has in turn contributed to the sustained authority of France in the country, both contributing factors for Gabon's remaining an extension of its former colonizer. As stated in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, language *is* power and language *has* power. Thus the persistent presence and influence of France in Gabon is a result of the linguistic policy attached to the French language, enforced during colonialism.

This chapter has demonstrated that France intended to create an extension of itself in language and culture in French Equatorial Africa by establishing a relationship between language and power. Because of its pervasive nature, the colonial policy used by France in Gabon to acquire power centered on the acquisition of French language fluency. The acquisition of French fluency was reinforced through strict educational models, which contributed to the successful implementation of cultural imperialism. Phillipson states, "Language is the means used to mediate and express imperialism."¹²⁹ The combination of linguistic and cultural imperialism in Gabon resulted in economic discrimination via the creation of schools, which then resulted in economic dependence, a

129. Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 65.

chief element in power imbalance. As a result of their dependence on France, which lasted until the gain of independence and beyond, colonies like Gabon were crafted as reflections of their colonizer and an avenue for the growth of the *Métropole* in which language and power were intertwined as indicated in this chapter. By understanding these mechanisms uniting language and power in French colonization, we better understand the current landscape of Gabon. Gabon's colonial history helps to situate its current position with respect to language and power in the neocolonial context. Evidenced by the status of the French language and educational system in Gabon, Gabon thus was and remains an extension of France, both as a result of history and the country's inability to assert an independent identity.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATION

La politique linguistique de l'éducation au Gabon est uniquement centralisée autour du français qui est non seulement seul médium d'instruction, mais également matière enseignée aussi bien au niveau primaire qu'au niveau secondaire. Le français est également le médium d'instruction dans l'ensemble de l'enseignement supérieur.

Hugues Steve NDINGA-KOUMBA-BINZA¹³⁰

The language education policy in Gabon is completely centralized around the French language which is not only the medium of instruction, but also a subject taught in both primary and secondary education. French is also the medium of instruction in all higher education.

(My translation)

During colonialism, education was used as a weapon by France. The French administration saw education as an avenue for linguistic, cultural, and economic imperialism. As discussed in chapter 3, the creation of schools and the demand for linguistic acculturation created a means of complete dependency: a dependency that affected the ability of a nation state to be self-governing. Independence in 1960 failed to bring changes that would differentiate Gabon from its colonizer. The inability to change the structures initiated by France allowed for the continuation of major colonial institutions, including education. Although some changes have been incorporated into Gabon's system of education since 1970, there are still similarities: a partial similarity in structure and an identical one in educational content. The perceived influence of France in education and the lack of visible changes in secondary education raise questions such as, does the lack of change amount to Gabonese pupils being educated in a system that is

130. Hugues Steve NDINGA-KOUMBA-BINZA, "Politique Linguistique et Éducation au Gabon : Un Etat des Lieux," *Journal of Education* 4 (2005) : 65-78.

very much French centered? If so, what are the consequences? If not, what substitutions have been implemented?

Gabon has made strides toward autonomy and self-representation in its educational model but indirectly still allows France to determine what and whom its pupils should study. In order to answer these questions, I use this chapter to do a comparative study of the Gabonese and French educational models and the educational materials being used in both countries. This is done to illustrate the similarities and dissimilarities between both educational systems and to speculate on reasons for the lack of change in Gabon's educational establishment. This discussion also briefly scrutinizes the manufacturing and publishing locations of textbooks in order to demonstrate the ideology imposed on Gabonese students.

Gabon and France's Educational Principles and Models¹³¹

The current educational model in Gabon resembles the one implemented during colonialism, with a few changes administered after independence in 1960. The basis of the model relies upon Article 16/66 introduced on August 9, 1966. Article 16 of 1966 stipulates that education must ensure the physical, intellectual, moral, and civic training of future citizens. Education additionally must contribute to national unity and social cohesion, thanks to mutual exchange of information and documentation with other bodies of government. Article 16 further specifies that the languages of instruction, in which the

131. All information from the subsequent paragraphs about Gabon and France educational systems are summarized from the UNESCO- International Bureau of Education report of 2010 and the CONFÈMEN (Conference of Education Ministers of Countries Using French as a Common Language)-PASEC (Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFÈMEN) report of 2008. "Données mondiale de l'éducation," UNESCO-IBE, 2010.

state determines the terms and conditions of instruction and its use, be French and the national languages. The law similarly affirms that children and adults benefit from equal access to instruction and that education be free and compulsory for all children age six to sixteen years old, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, or social origin. Law 10/84 of July 30, 1984, in Gabon, succeeds the law of 1966 and further defines primary education, establishing the principles that govern its organization. The later law of February 8, 1995, *l'arrêté 0001*, reorganized vocational education by introducing two career paths, technical and professional.

By contrast, schools in France are based on a foundation of republican values and principles that are rooted in the work of the Marquis de Condorcet and the Declaration of Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789.¹³² The Declaration promotes public education, secularism, freedom, and equality. In addition to the Declaration of Rights, the orientation law of July 10, 1989, affirms in its first article that education is the first national priority and sets out the four main missions of schools. The first mission is the transmission of knowledge and general culture. The second mission is the development of the personality of young people and the learning of citizenship. The third mission is the preparation for a professional life (and not just a specific profession) by acquiring a recognized degree/certificate. The last mission is the contribution to equality of opportunity and the reduction of inequalities related to an individual or social handicap. The law of 1989 was amended to introduce the law of orientation and program for the future of schools in April 23, 2005. The new law defines the objective of compulsory

132. Marquis de Condorcet was a French philosopher, mathematician, and political scientist who advocated for free and equal public education.

schooling. The law must guarantee that each student has the necessary means to acquire a “common foundation,” which establishes a set of knowledge and skills.

Although slightly different in approaches and principles, the objectives of education for Gabon and France are comparable. Both countries believe in fostering national identity through education. Providing obligatory and free schooling is also highlighted as a must by the governments. Finally, both countries endeavor to remove discrimination in education.

A Comparison Chart of the Educational Systems in France and Gabon¹³³

Both educational systems are also similarly structured as can be seen from the table below.

	Gabon	France
Calendar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School begins in late September and ends in mid-July. • The academic year is divided into three trimesters: first trimester begins in September and ends in December, second trimester begins in January and ends in March, and the third trimester begins in April and ends in July. This applies solely to kindergarten, primary, and secondary education. • A year of instruction consists of 30 weeks. The 30 weeks are further divided into five levels. Each level possesses five weeks of systematic learning with one week reserved for the integration of new policies adopted during academic year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school year for primary and secondary institutions consisted of 36 weeks. The 36 weeks represented 144 days for elementary school and 178 days for high school. This was changed in 2008 to 38 weeks. • Since the introduction of the 4-day school week in September 2008, with 24 hours of class per week (not including the hours of personalized assistance), the number of hours per day in primary education increased to six hours. • The calendar for higher education is simply organized into semesters.

133. For the definition of all acronyms, please refer to Appendix A.

	<p>The consistent occurrence of strikes by teachers and students has contributed to the integration of a sixth week.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The academic year for higher education is divided into two semesters. 	
<i>Préprimaire/</i> Pre-primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children from three to five years old. • Depending on availability children attend nursery school, or <i>crèches</i>, at age two. • Available in kindergartens and certain primary schools. • Not compulsory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children from three to six years old. • Depending on availability children attend nursery school, or <i>crèches</i>, at age two. Kindergarten is part of primary education, of which there are three sections. The first section focuses on children three and four years old. The second section focuses on children four and five years old. The third section focuses on children five to six years old. • The first two years form the first cycle of schooling called initial learning. The later years of kindergarten, five to six years old, in conjunction with the first and second year of primary school, constitute the learning stage of basic skills. • Not compulsory.
<i>Primaire/</i> Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins at age six. • Compulsory and free (unless private). • In 2002 lasted six years and divided into three cycles of two years each. During academic year 2003-2004, lasted five years and organized in three sub-cycles: first year (early learning), second and third years (basic skills), and fourth and fifth years (in-depth study). • Courses begin with <i>Cours préparatoire (CP)</i>, preparatory courses, continues through 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed for children age six to eleven. • Compulsory and free (unless private). • First two years focus on basic skills (really begins in pre-primary), and comprise <i>Cours préparatoire (CP)</i>, preparatory courses, and <i>classe du cours élémentaire (CE1)</i>, elementary school course. • Last three years focus on in-depth study, second year of elementary school (<i>CE2</i>) and two years of middle-level

	<p><i>classe du cours élémentaire (CE1)</i>, elementary school course, and ends with middle-level courses, or <i>cours moyen CM1</i> and <i>CM2</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral and written exams are administered monthly. • End of primary education results in acquisition of a CEPE. 	<p>courses, or <i>cours moyen CM1</i> and <i>CM2</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National assessment at the end of each cycle. • The transition to secondary institutions is automatic and does not require entrance exams. • No certificate is provided for the completion of elementary education.
Secondaire/ Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to secondary education is attained through admission exam. • Focuses on students from 12 to 18 years old. • Lasts for seven years and divided into two cycles. First cycle, from sixth to ninth grade, results in the acquisition of a <i>BEPC</i>. Second cycle, from tenth to twelfth grade, results in the acquisition of a baccalaureate. • At the end of tenth grade all students elect one specialty from various training paths, including economic and social, arts, and scientific. • Offer general, professional, and technical subjects/paths. • Technical and vocational path are taught in professional and vocational institutions and the École Nationale de Commerce, National School of Commerce. • Examinations determine admission. • Vocational training lasts between one to three years. Completion of the program results in three certificates: completion of primary school, completion of secondary year, or completion of eighth grade. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compulsory and includes two levels, the <i>collège</i> and the <i>lycée</i>. <i>Collège</i>, or middle school, is regarded as the lower secondary school and serves all students who completed primary education. • Middle school lasts for a period of four years and since 1966 has been organized into three cycles: sixth grade is considered the adaptation cycle; seventh and eighth grades form the central cycle; and ninth grade corresponds to the cycle of orientation, cycle of educational choice for further study. • At the end of ninth grade students receive a <i>DNB</i>. • At the end of tenth grade all students elect one specialty from the three training paths (economic and social, arts, or scientific), or choose one of the seven series available under the technical path. The number of series increased to eight in 2013. • Passing the exam does not automatically translate to entrance into high school (or upper secondary). • <i>Lycée</i>, or upper secondary, is organized into two cycles, determining cycle (tenth grade)

	<p>Other certificates gained are a CFP, a CAP, and or a BEP.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical training lasts three years and results in the gain of a BT and technical baccalaureate. BT is a vocational training diploma used for immediate access to the workforce, whereas the second diploma opens access to higher education. • Evaluation in secondary education, administered quarterly, focuses on oral performance rather than regular homework. • Passing one class automatically translates into acceptance into the next higher class. 	<p>and terminal cycle (eleventh and twelfth grades). Also includes three training paths: general, technical, and professional.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The general and technical paths comprise three years: tenth grade, eleventh grade, and twelfth grade. Both paths lead to a general and technical baccalaureate. A technical certificate (<i>BT</i>) can also be received in two years. • Vocational school (the professional path) lasts between two and three years, and prepares students for the acquisition of a <i>CAP</i>, a <i>BEP</i>, a <i>BTS</i>, a <i>DNTS</i>, and a professional diploma.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education is accessible through various institutions: universities, colleges, and institutes. • Acceptance is gained through examinations. • Uses LMD system. • There are two institutions for teaching certificates: l'école normale supérieure, known as <i>ENS</i>, and l'école normale supérieure de l'enseignement technique, known as <i>ENSE</i>. <i>ENS</i> trains educational counselors, inspectors, and secondary teachers, and leads to the acquisition of a <i>CAPC</i> and <i>CAPES</i>. <i>ENSE</i> leads to the acquisition of a <i>CAPCET</i> and a <i>CAPLT</i>. <i>CAPCET</i> lasts three years and <i>CAPLT</i> lasts two years. • In relation to university diplomas, short courses of two years prepare pupils for associate degrees in: literary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education is characterized by the coexistence of a plurality of different institutions with goals, structures, and admission requirements. • Traditionally university education was organized into three cycles of successive studies. The first cycle focused on training and orientation. The second cycle focused on in-depth study, general education, and scientific and technical studies. The cycle led to a <i>License</i> (bac + 3 years) and <i>Master</i> (bac + 4 years). The third cycle led either to research (PhD) or a highly specialized degree (<i>DESS</i>). • In 2002, France implemented the LMD system. • The institutions provide five types of formations: university courses; preparatory classes for higher-ranking establishments

Supérieur/ Higher Education	<p>studies (<i>DUEL</i>), scientific studies (<i>DUES</i>), Legal Studies (<i>DUEJ</i>), Economic studies (<i>DUEE</i>), or Technology (<i>DUT</i>).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students receive a <i>License</i> (a professional or academic degree) three years after the <i>bac</i>. Students receive a <i>Master I</i>, one year, and <i>Master II</i>, two years, after a <i>License</i>. The title of Doctor of Medicine is issued three years after <i>Master II</i>. 	<p>(<i>CPGE</i>), based in high schools; <i>Grand Écoles</i>; higher technical sections (<i>STS</i>); and specialized schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> These institutions are further distinguished by four categorizations of accessibility: 1) those accessed directly with a baccalaureate or equivalent, 2) those accessed via a selection procedure, 3) those accessed by competitive entrance exams, and 4) those accessed mainly after the acquisition of a <i>License</i>. In relation to university diplomas, associate programs prepare pupils to receive various degrees, including a degree in scientific studies (<i>DUEST</i>) and technology (<i>DUT</i>). Students receive a <i>License</i> (professional or academic) three years after the <i>bac</i>. Students receive a <i>Master I</i>, one year, and <i>Master II</i>, two years, after a <i>License</i>. The title of Doctor of Medicine is issued three years after <i>Master II</i>.
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Table 1: Chart of the Educational Systems in France and Gabon

As demonstrated above, the educational systems of both countries resemble each other. In addition to the likeness, there are differences created by the socio-political context of each country. For example, primary education in Gabon is extremely dissimilar to that of France in terms of class size, location of classes, and repeaters. During the 2004-2005 academic year, of the 1,396 schools registered, 894 or 64% were in rural areas. The remaining 36% of schools were in urban areas. The discrepancy in the number of schools between urban and rural areas is a direct result of the size of classes

and enrollment. Rural schools generally have low enrollments, whereas urban institutions have larger classes. A total of 67.4% of students reside in urban cities, whereas 32.6% of pupils live in rural locations. The high percentage of students in urban schools results in a higher student to teacher ratio, which varies from 80-100 students per teacher, whereas rural institutions have a ratio of 50-59 students per teacher.

Furthermore, repetition rates (*redoublements*) are substantial in Gabon at the rate of approximately 35% or higher. For this reason, the classes in the second and third cycles of primary education in Gabon are mainly made up of repeaters. Repeaters account for 50% of students in the first year and 30% in the second year. These students later often become school dropouts. Approximately 25% or more of any cohort does not complete primary school and fewer than 5% of those admitted in the first year complete all levels without repeating. Of those who complete fifth grade only 62% successfully pass the entrance exam to sixth grade.

In addition to issues related to primary education, secondary education also provides additional differences between Gabon and France. Understaffing and congestion characterize the country's *secondaire*. The number of students per class varies from 80 to 120. This is a result in part of the disproportionate demand for education because of the slow creation of new institutions. In 2007, 69 schools educated 96,058 students. In addition, the substantial presence of repeaters slows and congests the educational system. An investigation performed in 2005 recorded that 58.9% of students in the second year and 82% of pupils in the fifth year had already repeated a grade. Of students in the fifth year of education, 35.3% had repeated more than once. Finally, the lack of teachers contributes to the high student per teacher ratios. Teachers in secondary education are not

well paid. For this reason, continual strikes occur in Gabon. These issues are not prevalent in France.

The reasons for the significant repetition rate are numerous. Conditions of schools do not inspire positive learning environments. Constant strikes by teachers and students destabilize the learning process and affects students' performances. Similarly, constant change in education leadership negates progresses established. In addition, teachers are not actually teaching because of dissatisfaction with salaries. Likewise, the educational content used is not localized to students' academic levels. The importation of books results in students learning more about other places and ideologies than their own; there is a possibility that the influence of foreign content is not well received by pupils. Finally, a lack of motivation to succeed is crippling Gabonese students. These issues exacerbate the difficulty of primary and secondary education in Gabon, and contribute to the poor performances and low graduation rates of students. The situation in Gabon is thus different from France.

Higher education in Gabon and France are similar in structure but differ in opportunities and accessibility. At present, opportunities for education in Gabon have increased. Higher education in Gabon is one of few public options with multiple private institutions. As detailed in Chapter 2, since the 1970s Gabon has created two universities, *L'Université Omar Bongo* and *L'Université des Sciences et Techniques de Masuku*. Apart from these two universities, tertiary education in Gabon is provided by private establishments and confined to colleges or specialized institutes.

The lack of public universities has resulted in the development of educational partnerships between the government and private institutions. With these agreements,

Gabonese students receive subsidies and scholarships for institutions they qualify to attend. The scarcity of public universities has contributed to the dearth of specialized higher degree programs in Gabon. Citizens are unable to obtain certain M.A. and Ph.D. degrees, and as a result must go to France and other nation states for tertiary and postgraduate education.

The inability of Gabonese citizens to obtain specific degrees in Gabon negatively impacts its society. Repeatedly, study abroad students elect to remain in their countries of study, thus depriving Gabonese society of its intellectual class. Only recently were students required to sign an agreement demanding a return to Gabon for those hoping to study abroad. It can be argued that the culmination of few public universities and exodus to France for tertiary and postgraduate education has led to the tolerance of French educational materials in Gabon and the French influence in Gabon's education. The fact that this phenomenon has been ongoing since the colonial period further supports that position.

Analyses of Textbooks

In this section I analyze books used in sixth and twelfth grades in Gabon and France. The section only focuses on four subjects: history, geography, civics, and grammar/literature. The purpose for the book analyses is to highlight the similarities and dissimilarities between educational materials used in Gabon and France, and to determine whether there is a French influence in Gabon's textbooks. I decided to focus on sixth and twelfth grades because they symbolize the beginning and end of secondary education, and because the majority of pupils in Gabon are affected academically in sixth and twelfth grades.

My analysis, examining books used in Gabon with a focus on secondary schools and brief consideration of books for primary schools, demonstrates that claims often espoused by publishing houses are not realized. The claims of localizing materials to students' socio-political contexts are unlikely to resemble the reality experienced by students in Gabon. For example, the majority of books used in Gabon are published by Hachette Livre and Hachette Livre International (thereafter written as HL and HLI). HLI constitutes part of HL and describes itself as follows.

Présent dans plus de 20 pays, HLI édite des manuels scolaires et parascolaires, de la littérature jeunesse et des livres pratiques sous trois marques différentes : ÉDICEF, Hatier International et Hachette Livre International. Par ailleurs, HLI diffuse à l'étranger et dans les Dom Tom les ouvrages de tous les éditeurs du groupe *Hachette Livre*, ainsi que ceux des éditeurs extérieurs diffusés par lui. Toutes les marques sont représentées par des délégués pédagogiques et des commerciaux qui sillonnent le monde pour les faire connaître et les diffuser.¹³⁴ (Emphasis added)

Present in over 20 countries, HLI publishes academic and extracurricular textbooks, children literature and practical books under three different brands: EDICEF, Hatier International, and Hachette Livre International. Moreover, HLI distributes abroad and in overseas territories books from all Hachette Livre publishers, as well as those of outside publishers. All brands are represented by educational and business delegates who travel the world to promote and disseminate them. (My translation)

Hachette Livre website describes itself as follows.

A subsidiary of the French media giant Lagardère *and a depository of part of France's cultural heritage*, pushing beyond its historical borders, pursuing the adventure Louis Hachette began in 1826. Today, the Group brings together a broad spectrum of prestigious publishers covering the entire consumer book market. Three words can describe the Group: diversity, independence, and profitability.¹³⁵ (Emphasis added)

134. "Édicef et Hatier international, éditeurs de la planète francophone," accessed December 5, 2013, <http://www.editions-hachette-livre-international.com/>.

135. "Our Commitment," accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.hachette.com/en/about-us/our-commitment>.

Although independence is used as a descriptive characteristic in its narrative, HL fails to allow true independence for Gabon by dictating the formation and content of its educational materials. France's cultural heritage is imposed upon Gabon through its affiliates and subsidiaries such as EDICEF, Editions Classiques d'Expression Française (Editions of Classics French Expression); IPAM, Institut Pédagogique Africain et Malgache (African and Malagasy Pedagogical Institute); and others. The editors of HLI consist of professionals from numerous countries. Although Gabon produces educational materials as a collaboration with EDICEF through the publishing house EDIG (Éducation Nationale par les Éditions Gabonaises, National Education by the Gabonese Editions), its participation appears to be limited to primary education. According to HLI's website, EDIG creates all materials in primary education in Gabon under a collection named *Super En*.¹³⁶ This has allowed Gabon to have an input in the materials its students use. The contribution of Gabon, however, ends with primary education because books are mainly imported from France for secondary education.

Geography Textbooks

In order to demonstrate the persistent influence that France maintains on Gabonese education through the course materials deployed in Gabonese classrooms, we first examine geography books. Geography books are produced by HLI, sometimes in collaboration with EDICEF, EDIG, and IPAM. The books are customized to educate those in secondary education, which include grades sixth to twelfth. A preface of one of the books alleges to offer “*Un ouvrage de référence richement illustré qui guide le lycéen*

136. “Nos coéditeurs,” accessed December 5, 2013, <http://www.editions-hachette-livre-international.com/nos-partenaires/>.

gabonais dans la complexité du monde qui l'entoure,” a richly illustrated reference book that guides the Gabonese high school student in the complexity of the world around him.¹³⁷ The same book also claims to offer “*Une meilleure compréhension de leur [les élèves] environnement et de celui des hommes d'autres milieux,*” a better understanding of students' environment and the people of other backgrounds (emphasis added).¹³⁸

The intention to introduce life in other locations is realized but that of the students' own environments is barely realized. This is admirable in its intent but the fact that Gabonese students do not truly explore Gabon's geography until twelfth grade negates the aforementioned prefaces. Only a single chapter in a sixth grade textbook, chapter 2 of *Nouvelle Géographie 6ème* (1990), addresses Gabon and its geographical situation. The remaining nine chapters display images and briefly discuss Africa as a whole. When juxtaposed to non-Gabonese and non-African content, the amount related to Gabon is insignificant. Sixth grade books used and produced in France provide similar content to those found in Gabon with minor differences. The content is similarly constructed and structured. The only visible difference remains in the mention of Paris, as a focus of locale and context, while Gabon and Africa are the focus in Gabonese materials.¹³⁹

For example, the book used in Gabon, *Nouvelle Géographie 6ème*, and the textbook used in France, *Histoire-Géographie 6ème* (2009), are similar in content.¹⁴⁰

Chapter 2 (pp. 22-35) in Gabon and chapter 12 (pp. 176-94) in France both discuss

137. Institut Pédagogique Africain et Malgache, *Nouvelle géographie 6ème* (Paris : EDICEF, 1990).

138. Institut Pédagogique Africain et Malgache.

139. Institut Pédagogique Africain et Malgache.

140. Martin Ivernel, *Histoire-Géographie 6ème* (Paris: Hatier, 2009).

country specific issues. Chapter 3 (pp. 36-83) in Gabon and chapter 18 (pp. 290-309) in France focus on the earth and various terrains in the world (i.e. deserts, mountains, and more). The only difference is that Gabon's textbook provides more details and examples, whereas France's provides fewer. Chapter 4 (pp. 54-73) in Gabon and chapter 17 (pp. 270-89) in France both focus on climate and various terrains in the world. Chapter 5 (pp. 74-85) in Gabon and chapter 13-14 (pp. 194-227) focus on the world population, migrations, and demographic boundaries. Chapter 6 (pp. 94-120) in Gabon and chapter 16 (pp. 250-70) in France both discuss traditional agriculture and rural life in various countries (i.e. France, U.S, and Africa). Chapter 10 (pp. 170-89) in Gabon and Chapter 15 (pp. 230-49) in France both discuss urbanization and cities.

In addition to the similarities described above, there were two differences. First, the geography book in Gabon has a total of ten chapters, three more chapters than that of France, and is not a combined edition devoted to history and geography, whereas France's material only has seven chapters and is combined with a history section. Second, Gabon's book begins with a chapter on earth and its characteristics, whereas the book used in France begins with France as the point of interest and then extends to the rest of the world. These examples highlight how similar sixth grade geography materials are in both countries; the same pattern extends to twelfth grade textbooks.

Twelfth grade books used in Gabon, written by French writers and published in Paris by Hachette Education, focus on world geography, especially European geography. Nothing substantial about Gabon in particular and Africa in general is provided until students are close to graduation. Twelfth grade geography textbooks in France have a similar construct to that of Gabon. The textbooks focus on globalization and the position

of France in the world. The focus on globalization allows for a brief investigation and observation about Africa, but nothing very specific.

One of the books used in Gabon by students is *Géographie, terminales ES-L-S* (2004), and one of the books used in France by pupils is *Histoire-Géographie Term STMG* (2013).¹⁴¹ In content, both books are similar except that the last half study section in Gabon's textbook discusses countries in development, whereas in the French textbook the content is very specific to France's position in the world. For example, chapters 1-8 (pp. 22-133) in *Géographie, terminales ES-L-S* are specific to globalization, the geographic distribution of the world, and the three major power areas in the world. This section focuses specifically on the U.S, the European Union, and East Asia. Chapters 9-11 (pp. 134-337) focus on globalization in relation to developing nations including Russia and nations in the south (i.e. below the U.S and Europe). Similarly, *Histoire-Géographie Term STMG* discusses globalization, the three major power areas, and developing nations in chapter 4 and 5 (pp. 138-90). By contrast, chapter 6 (pp. 220-30) focuses on the position of France in the world. Other than the last half of the study, both books are similar in content and structure.

History Textbooks

History books follow the same pattern as geography materials. A few primary school history books are published by EDIG. The books' primary focus is to educate those in fourth and fifth grades. Books used for secondary education are manufactured in France and published by Hatier International and Hachette Education. Sixth grade history

141. Alain Joyeux, *Géographie, terminales ES-L-S* (Paris : Hachette Education, 2004). Alain Prost and Christine Lécureux, *Histoire-Géographie-Éducation Civique Term STMG* (Paris: Hachette Education, 2013).

books in Gabon focus on African and World history, and are stated to have been written by African teachers. The content includes selective African history, but nothing about Gabon. Sixth grade history books used in France, like geography materials, are similar in subject matter to those in Gabon. The only difference is in the amount of information about Africa. Gabonese textbooks include an additional chapter on the history of Africa and the evolution of man in relation to Africa. French textbooks lack this specific annotation but still possess content about Africa in other contexts.

One of the books used in Gabon is *L'Afrique et le monde histoire 6ème* (1994), while *Histoire-Géographie 6ème* (2009) is used in France.¹⁴² Both books are similar in content and almost in structure. For example, chapters 6-10 (pp. 53-86) in Gabon and chapter 1 (pp.12-29) in France both discuss the history of Egypt, its civilization, its belief system, and the city of Mesopotamia. Chapters 11, 13-14 (pp. 97-104, 111-22) in Gabon and chapters 2-5 (pp. 30-85) in France focus on the history of Greece, its population, and its religion. Chapters 16-18 (pp. 137-64) in Gabon and chapters 6-7 (pp. 86-123) in France discuss the history of Rome. Chapter 19 (pp. 165-72) in Gabon and chapters 8-10 (pp. 124-65) in France focus on Judaism and Christianity. Finally, chapters 20-22 (pp. 177-90) in Gabon and chapter 11 (pp. 166-75) in France discuss China, India, and Indian the Ocean. As can be seen in the outlined of the chapters, pupils in both France and Gabon are learning comparable Eurocentric information. There are a few distinctions between the textbooks. First, Gabon's textbook has a total of 23 chapters because of it being a combined edition, whereas France has a total of 11 chapters. Second, Gabon's

142. Groupe D'Enseignants, *L'Afrique et le monde histoire 6ème* (Paris: Hatier, 1994). Also see Ivernel, *Histoire-Géographie 6ème*.

textbook has seven more chapters that address Hebrew history, Libya, Carthage (Tunisia), and African history. These are found in chapters 1-5 (pp. 11-48), 12 (pp. 105-10), and 15 (pp. 129-36).

Twelfth grade books in Gabon discuss world and French history regardless of the chosen track (general, scientific, or literature), and are written by French speakers in France. The books focus on colonization, Europe (i.e. France), and include little information on Africa, with practically no mention of Gabon. The focus is so painfully European that its use in Gabon is astonishing and absolutely contradictory to the stated goal of “Gabonization” and “Africanization” of the curriculum. Twelfth grade history materials in France have a structure similar to those in Gabon. The first part of the book focuses on international relations, followed by the era of decolonization, and then the construction of new nation states. The only visible difference is in the first half of the study, which focuses on France and its Fifth Republic, whereas in Gabon the focus is on France from 1945 to modern times.

One of the books used in Gabon is *Histoire terminales ES-L-S* (2007), and *Histoire-Géographie-Éducation Civique Term STMG* (2013) is used in France.¹⁴³ Both books are similar in content and structure but still have differences. For example, chapters 1-6, 9-10, 11-13 (pp. 14-123, 166-205, 206-51) in Gabon and chapter 1 (pp. 14-31) in France both discuss the history of Europe from 1945 to modern times. The sections also focus on international relations and globalization. Chapters 7-8 (pp. 124-65) in Gabon and chapter 2 (pp. 60-85) in France focus on the period of decolonization and the

143. Jean-Michel Lambin, *Histoire Terminales ES-L-S* (Paris: Hachette Education, 2007). Also see Prost and Lécureux, *Histoire-Géographie-Éducation Civique*.

formation of new nation-states. Chapters 16-17 (pp. 290-337) in Gabon and chapters 3 (pp. 100-27) in France discuss the history of France under the governance of the Fifth Republic from 1962-81. As demonstrated in the outline of the chapters, the content in Gabon and France is eerily similar. Although alike, there are a few distinctions between both textbooks. First, Gabon's textbook has a total of 20 chapters, whereas France only has 3 detailed chapters. Second, Gabon's textbook is very focused on France in comparison to the French textbook, which was specific to international relations. For example, four chapters in the book, chapters 14-15 and 18-20 (pp. 252-88, 338-400) solely discuss the history of France from 1945 to modern times.

Grammar and Literature Textbooks

Certain French grammar and literature textbooks are produced in France, while others are produced in neighboring African nation states. The focus of the first five years of secondary school is on reading, writing, and understanding the French language, whereas the remaining two years focus on literature. Grammar books used in sixth grade in Gabon are manufactured by EDICEF with content input from IPAM. One of the grammar books used in Gabon is *Grammaire du français 6ème/5ème* (1991). The textbook includes illustrations of Africa. Stories include names considered "African" and certain concepts are specific to the African continent. The book focuses on grammar, orthography, conjugation, and lexicography.¹⁴⁴

Grammar books used in France in sixth grade, although distinct in manufacturer and cultural specificity, are similar in content and objective to those in Gabon. One of the

144. *Grammaire du français 6ème/5ème* (Paris: EDICEF and IPAM, 1991).

grammar books used in France is *Français 6ème* (2009).¹⁴⁵ The focus of the French textbooks is also to teach grammar, orthography, conjugation, and lexicography. Not only is the content comparable but so is the arrangement of the material. For example, both textbooks introduce language and communication in chapter 1 (pp. 5-10, and pp. 14-39). Subsequent lessons on oral and written language, verb conjugation, and more follow a similar pattern. Of course this similarity could be a result of the wide adaptation of the teaching of French in francophone nation-states. The fact that books from both France and Gabon are produced and manufactured in France and by French companies, and that they are similar in structure and in content is not mere coincidence.

In addition to the similarities in content, there are variations in the literature used for practical exercises. *Grammaire du français 6ème/5ème* mainly uses African literature and includes authors such as Mariama Bâ and Peter Abrahams, with a few other works from France published by HL such as *Le Livre de Paris* (1951), *The Book of Paris*. Although the texts being used are from Africa, the majority of them are affiliated with HL and HLI. By contrast, *Français 6ème* uses more varied literature from around the world including Léon Tolstoï and Michel Ocelot. Although the French textbook has international works, the majority of writers are from Europe with a few from the U.S and Canada, and two authors from Brazil and Africa. The difference in literature is the only notable and significant difference in the educational materials.

Twelfth grade literature materials in Gabon are much more varied. Certain books are written and constructed by French nationals while others are written by African

145. Chantal Bertagna, *Français 6ème* (Paris: Hachette Education, 2009).

teachers. The textbooks are manufactured by EDICEF and Nathan in France. The preface of *Le Français en première et terminale* (2000) is written as follows.

*Découvrir et étudier la richesse de la littérature francophone (avec de nombreuses chronologies et encadrés sur l'histoire littéraire et sur les principaux genres) mais aussi anglophone et lusophone du continent ; et se préparer méthodiquement aux exercices du baccalauréat (résumé, commentaire, texte argumentatif ou dissertation) et à l'épreuve de culture générale des grands concours.*¹⁴⁶ (Emphasis added)

Discover and explore the richness of French literature (with timelines and sidenotes on literary history and key genres) and also English and Portuguese literature from the continent; and methodically prepare exercises for the baccalaureate (focusing on summary, commentary, argumentative text, or essay) and national exams. (My translation)

The intention to “explore and discover the richness of French, English, and Portuguese literature” is only evident in the structure of some books and not in others. Books on both French and African literature used in Gabon, such as the once detailed above, have an equal amount of each and include a small number of English and Portuguese works. The French authors presented were 90% from France while the authors of African works were mostly concentrated in the western-central region of Africa. One author, Laurent Owendo, was from Gabon. For example, pages 14-109 showcased French authors, pages 110-97 outlined African writers, and the remaining pages focused on English and Portuguese literature with a few other African works.¹⁴⁷

By twelfth grade, grammar in France is no longer the focus, instead literature is. Twelfth grade literature textbooks either focus on both French and African literature or solely on French writers and works, as in Gabon. The materials are similar in content to those in Gabon even though they are manufactured by different publishers. Similarly, the

146. Félix Bikoï et al., *Le français en première et terminale* (Paris: EDICEF, 2000).

147. Bikoï et al., *Le français en première et terminale*.

authors and content presented are comparable. For example, *Anthologie de textes littéraires: Du Moyen-Age au XXe siècle* (1998) outlines similar authors (such as Molière and Victor Hugo) present in Gabon's *Littérature Française* (2007). It is worth noting that the similarity in content is in part due to the specific time period discussed in both textbooks.¹⁴⁸

Civic Textbooks

Civic books appear to be one of the contributions made by Gabon. The books are published by EDIG in collaboration with EDICEF and ACCT (Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique, Cultural and Technical Cooperation Agency) and printed in Gabon. The books are written and illustrated by Gabonese researchers and educators. Textbooks used in civic classes focus primarily on citizenship with particular attention to the nuclear family structure. Sixth grade materials, *D'Éducation Civique 6ème* (1995), use Gabon and Africa as source and center for examples. Only on two distinct occasions, chapter 13 (pp. 28-9) and 14 (pp. 30-1), were non-Gabonese and non-African information included. The lessons taught focus solely on basic knowledge, including the rights of a citizen and the role of a student. The lessons hardly discuss government. Chapter 10 (pp. 22-3) and 20 (pp. 42-3) respectively address the process of electing a school official, and the function of the police. The booklet provides a civil code for Gabon, but it is located in the appendix (pp. 45), which makes it doubtful that students are reading it unless needed in class for a specific lesson.¹⁴⁹

148. Bernard Alluin, *Anthologie de textes littéraires : Du Moyen-Age au XXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette Livre, 1998).

149. *D'Éducation Civique 6ème* (Libreville, Gabon: EDIG, EDICEF, 1995).

Nothing specific to Gabon's particular form of government is included. Gabon is a republic whereby the president is the head of state and the prime minister is the chief of government. The government exercises the executive power. Legislative power is vested in the two chambers of Parliament. The Republic is governed by the Constitution of 1991, which has been amended five times since its institution. The president is elected by universal suffrage for a seven-year term that is renewable for however long a presidency is won by a candidate. This information however is omitted in civic books.

Although Gabon's political system is not unique, its situation is. Gabon's second and former president, Omar Bongo, ruled for 42 years, the longest in Africa and possibly in the world, aside from Libya's leader, Muammar al-Gaddafi. Thus given the unique political situation of Gabon, why produce a civic book that fails to highlight it? Why write and produce books "specific" to Gabon that fail to discuss its socio-political climate? Gabon chooses to produce its own civic textbooks, not that very unique in content, yet allows and circulates other materials written and produced by France and other nation states. A possible reason is the wish of the government to control what is included in civic books, so as not to have foreign ideology that would incite political riots and dissent. Although nothing specific about the structure of Gabon's government is included, by manufacturing the books Gabon does not allow "foreign" concepts, different from those in Gabon, to be included.

Civics materials used in sixth grade in France mainly focus on children in the education system and their rights. There is a slight similarity to books used in Gabon in that they all address children in relation to education and their rights as part of such a system. For example, in *d'éducation civique 6ème* in Gabon chapters 6 (p. 14), 7 (p. 16),

8 (p. 18), and 15 (p. 32) are similar in content to chapters 2 (pp. 20-32), 3 (pp. 38-44), and 4 (pp. 48-62) in France's *Grandir Ensemble 6ème Éducation Civique* (2009).¹⁵⁰ The civics books used in Gabon, however, are focused on Gabon, whereas the materials used in France are general in content except for specific examples and illustrations related to France.

Civics textbooks in twelfth grade are a review of previous years, rather than an introduction to any new materials. Gabon does not manufacture civics books for twelfth grade; by that stage all education should have been received. In France the information is included in a combined volume of history and geography due to its brief nature, *Histoire-Geographie-éducation civique* (2013).¹⁵¹ Concepts such as the analysis of political discourse and the ability to vote from other countries are concisely introduced (146, 240). Nothing else substantial is offered.

Science, Mathematics, and English Textbooks

With the exception of civic textbooks and some elementary materials, other subjects follow a similar creation and distribution pattern in Gabon. Science books are produced in France and divided into various categories such as physics, general science, and life and earth science. Mathematic books, similar to history and geography books, are assembled outside of the country, specifically the Ivory Coast. Textbooks used in English classes are manufactured in France but are in English. One would assume the books are in French and address the English language, but the books are in English. This

150. Denis Sestier et al., *Grandir Ensemble Éducation Civique 6ème* (Paris: Hatier, 2009).

151. Prost and Lécureux, *Histoire-Géographie-Éducation Civique*.

raises several questions: which English is being taught in Gabon? Why then does Gabon import books instead of producing them? Why import them specifically from France and the Ivory Coast when there are other French-speaking countries able to provide textbooks? The answers are international cooperation and agreements.

International Cooperation and Agreements

International cooperation, subsidies, and the book industry are reasons associated with the lack of progress in the educational publishing industry in Gabon. Gabon and France have multiple cooperation agreements in various sectors, including the economy, education, and technology.¹⁵² These agreements determine where Gabon acquires educational materials for its students. Subsidies also determine how textbooks are acquired, proving to be a form of social aid meant to help lower prices paid by the families of students.

Countries in which families purchase school materials use these subsidies to import a large number of books. Gabon is such a country. These types of subsidies were introduced by the French Ministry of Cooperation during the early 1990s as a short-term solution to provide educational materials in former French colonies, but have remained in practice since then.¹⁵³ Sosale Shobhana, a World Bank researcher who investigated the educational publishing history of some African nations, stated that the purchase price of materials on French and mathematics in Gabon and Cameroon were “lowered by more than half” between 1991 and 1993 because of such subsidies.¹⁵⁴ The negative side to

152. Sosale Shobhana, *Educational Publishing in Global Perspectives: Capacity building and Trends* (Washington, D.C: World Bank, 1999). This source also details the information included below.

153. Sosale Shobhana, *Educational Publishing in Global Perspectives*.

154. Sosale Shobhana, *Educational Publishing in Global Perspectives*.

subsidies is that they do not help establish a publishing structure in the countries receiving the subsidies; they simply contribute to the import cycle of educational materials and perpetuation of neocolonialism.

Book supplies are also another way educational materials are acquired by Gabon. Book supplies are received in two ways, through donation and refundable financing.¹⁵⁵ Donations are free of charge with financing provided by development and aid organizations in order to alleviate the burden of book purchases for students. Refundable financing occurs when development banks (the World Bank, African Development Bank, and others) pay publishers the money used to provide books for certain countries. Refundable financing occurs when publishers bid for specific jobs including publishing bids or supplying bids for existing textbooks. Donations financing is much more flexible because orders are placed based on a mutual agreement between the organization and the country and often work as a short-term solution for textbooks shortages.¹⁵⁶ Similar to subsidies, book supplies do not help countries establish a publishing industry; they actually discourage local publishing and distribution. Because of the three reasons listed above, Hachette Livre and all its subsidiaries are furnishing the educational materials for Gabonese students.

Conclusion

The lack of secondary teachers, its newly acquired independence, its unsatisfactory student performances, and a low monetary reward associated with the education sector can also be cited as reasons for the lack of change in Gabon's

155. Sosale Shobhana, *Educational Publishing in Global Perspectives*.

156. Sosale Shobhana, *Educational Publishing in Global Perspectives*.

educational system. Independence was gained in 1960, which means Gabon has only been an independent nation for 54 years. The country is relatively young in its independence and must improve and further develop its own educational model. Though improvement is expected and hoped, the strong attachment to its former colonizer can be expected. Nonetheless, meaningful reforms should have been implemented.

Similarly, the absence of secondary teachers is crippling for Gabon. Those who are better suited to teach Gabonese culture and improve its educational system are either not able to do so or choose not to do so because of a mediocre salary imposed by the government. Also, the Gabonese hierarchy, which elevates certain industries to greater importance, has contributed to its poor educational system. Importance is placed on administration, oil, and science, and not nearly as much on education. Gabonese administrators and employees in science are paid substantially more than most teachers and professors. The inequality in pay compels educated persons to find positions in higher paying industries rather than work in education. Finally, due to Gabon's recent autonomy, its educated populace is still forming and developing. As of 2011, according to the Economic Policy Research Institute, only 1% of students in secondary schools graduated and the other 73% were either repeating grades or had elected to drop out.¹⁵⁷ The numbers for those continuing on to higher education in Gabon or abroad are just as dismal, at 5%.¹⁵⁸

In this chapter I have provided an overview on the educational models of both Gabon and France in order to delineate the similarities and dissimilarities between the

157. "Gabon," Education Policy and Data Center, last modified 2014, http://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EPDC%20NEP_Gabon.pdf

158. "Gabon," Education Policy and Data Center.

two. I also discussed the publishing and manufacturing locations of all materials used in France and Gabon and the consequences of the decisions to import academic materials rather than self-publish. Although changes have been adopted in France's educational model in 2002, Gabon's structure is similar to France'. Not only is the structural formation of education similar, the materials used by students are eerily identical in most subjects. With the exception of civic and a few grammar books in secondary education and textbooks in primary education, educational materials in Gabon are produced and manufactured in France.

Since most educational content is imported from and manufactured in France and the education models resemble each other, it is safe to conclude that Gabonese pupils are being educated in a French-centered system. Despite the fact that "Africanization" and "Gabonization" are at times visible in various subjects in Gabon, the fact that textbooks are mainly imported from and supplied by France and French entities suggests a French presence in Gabon's education. Thus, the persistent use of a French-centered educational model and French-focused materials directly contribute to French culture being embedded in Gabonese culture via education. By not properly funding education (such as textbooks and teacher) and not prioritizing the socio-cultural contexts of students (such as local languages and geography), the government of Gabon (and indirectly France) colluded to preserve French influence in Gabon.

The lack of self-representation in educational materials imposes a French influence on Gabonese pupils. The French influence in educational materials allows us to conclude that the Gabonese populace is indirectly contributing to rewriting itself academically as a continuation of the former colonizer. Gabon is translating itself as a

subordinate population of France. An argument can be made that the high dropout rates among Gabonese students is an inadvertent method to combat said indoctrination. It is a way to effectively reject cultural assimilation to French ideals via education. But such acts negatively affect Gabonese pupils; they are ultimately self-destructive. Not only is such a decision personally destructive, it does not suppress the influence inflicted upon them previously.

CHAPTER V

LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND IDENTITY

Our language is who we are, it allows us to know ourselves. If you don't speak your
language you're not a citizen.
Society is ruled by French. Can't manage without it.
Gabonese citizens¹⁵⁹

The identities of Gabonese citizens cannot be understood apart from education and language. As we have seen, education and language were mechanisms used during colonialism to achieve assimilation to French culture and language. The use of both by France had far-reaching consequences still visible today in Gabon. The use of French and exposure to a French curriculum system resulted in an educated Gabonese populace that resembled that of France. The identities Gabon's population was affected and shaped by the French language and a French-centered educational model. Academically and through language policy, Gabon was (in)directly perpetuating its position as a colony and an extension of France, allowing France to influence identities. The identities of Gabonese inhabitants are not singular in nature; they are actually hybrid, and not only determined by France and French influence. Nonetheless, the French presence plays a major part in the identity formation of Gabon's population, whatever their level of education.

Because of the connection between language and education, in this chapter I examine the impact of both on identity formation. I argue that both the French language and the France-centered education in Gabon have affected the identities of the inhabitants and established an extension of France in Gabon linguistically and academically. In order

159. Rebecca A. Mitchell, "Language, Education and Identity in Gabon," in *The Sociolinguistics of Language Education in International Contexts*, ed. Edith Esch et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 131.

to understand Gabonese citizens' identities in modern-day Gabon, one must understand the connection between language and education and their impact on identity formation.

The concept of identity formation and its connection to language and education can be better understood and illustrated by applying the theories of identity construction defined and explicated in the social sciences. In this chapter my arguments strongly rely on poststructuralist views of identity formation as it relates to language, discourse, and the classroom environment espoused during and after the mid-twentieth century by scholars such as Bourdieu (1977, 1991), Weedon (1997), Roeser, Peck, and Nasir (2006), among others.

Identity

Identity has been characterized in various ways. One viewpoint of identity is that it is fixed and innate. People holding this position believe that one's identity exists in a singular narrative that expands as one grows (Tracy, 2002; Hall, 1992; Wimmer, 2002). In this view, the foundation of an individual's identity has already been shaped by society and institutions, but various "components" might be added as one ages, components such as social and professional accomplishments. The components of identity vary depending on scholarly definitions. Some scholars (James, 1980; Erickson, 1968) interpret identity as merely psychological in content and process, believing the formation of one's identity as heavily internal and relevant to one's own self-characterization. This definition focuses on self-categorization, goals, and beliefs as well as self-reflection and self-appraisal. The individual develops and defines his/herself based on unique historical and social experiences, shaped by local and global environments. Other scholars (Mead, 1934; Cooley, 1902; Baldwin, 1895) interpret identity as heavily functioning as part of social

and cultural structures that ascribe labels, roles, and statuses to individuals. In this view of identity formation, the components of individuals' identities are based on group memberships and participation in sociocultural frameworks.

Another perspective views identity as being ascribed and biological. Depending on social contexts, a person's sense of self is determined by a dominant group. An example is the "untouchable" caste in India. The identity of "untouchable" is bestowed upon persons without the consent of those being prejudiced. A differing viewpoint categorizes identity as chosen rather than ascribed (McKinlay & Dunnett, 1998; Adelsward & Nilholm, 2000; Graham, 2007). A person can identify as anything he or she chooses.

Finally, identity has been described as a response to social contexts and interactions. Roy F. Baumeister and Mark Muraven (1996) propose the idea that identity occurs as an adaptation to social context, rather than a set of explicit traits assigned to an individual without choice. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) expands on this concept with his theory of "habitus." Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" defines identity as follows.

A system of dispositions to be and to do is a potentiality, a desire to be which, in a certain way, seeks to create the conditions of its fulfillment, and therefore to create the conditions most favorable to what it is. In the absence of any major upheaval (a change of position, for example), the conditions of its formations are also the conditions of its realization.¹⁶⁰

In lay terms, "habitus" refers to a set of bodily dispositions collected via engagement in daily activities and interactions that position us to act in certain ways. These dispositions are integrated into social experiences, and thus affect and define our actions and

160. Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 150.

experiences with our surroundings and people. It is through lived experiences that the habitus is repeatedly reconstructed. Similarly, according to Bourdieu, “how free or constrained we are by our habitus depends on the historically and socially situated conditions of its production.” Thus, the historical and social atmosphere and demands of a society shape the images and identities of individuals, and contribute to what is projected forward. People are a product of their environment, regardless of how harmless it is believed to be. Identities are altered by what is experienced and adopted. One cannot attempt to create an identity that is separate from social environments.

In this thesis I take the view that identity, although fluid and multifaceted, is inextricably tied to social and historical contexts, including language and education. The markers that form identity involve social and biological components of an individual, reflecting a culmination of independent systems that are context specific. Individuals appropriate differing identities defined by their affiliations with various groups. According to Jennifer M. Miller these identities are “multifaceted in complex and contradictory ways; tied to social practice and interaction as flexible and contextually contingent resources; and tied to processes of differentiation from other identified groups.” Thus the formation and characterization of a person’s self are shaped by one’s entire social context.

Because identities are fluid and multifaceted, and are shaped by the historical and social history of environments, Gabonese citizens cannot separate their identities from the French language and from France. The presence of France in Gabon dates back to the 1840s as shown in chapter 2. The French presence in Gabon, both religious and administrative, is embedded in Gabon’s culture. Gabon’s history is closely tied to France

and all of its social developments before and after independence involved the intervention of France. The French language was imposed on the population during colonialism and has remained the official language of the country. A French-centered educational system was instituted and still persists as the main model today. The economy of the country was dependent on French aid and France remains one of Gabon's major debt payers. All of these factors have affected and continue to affect the identities of the Gabonese population. For this reason, the identities of citizens of Gabon have been connected to France and the French language for more than a century and a half. Their identities cannot be constituted apart from French influence because it permeates all aspects of society and social institutions.

This is not to say that the Gabonese populace is without an identity outside of France. Gabon does have ethnic pride of various types. There are cultural customs, ideals, and practices with origins from Bantu heritage. For example, the musical scene, orality of literature, and sense of self for most are distinct from those of France. What cannot be ignored, however, is the influence of the French presence and involvement in Gabon, and how they have affected the identities of inhabitants. The phenomenon of a French influence in conjunction with a Gabonese identity is discussed as hybridity in certain contexts, both with reference to hybrid culture and hybrid identity.¹⁶¹

161. The concept of "hybridity" or cultural hybridization has been around since the twelfth century. The theory first emerged to address mixture among animals, then later evolved to describe the phenomenon of racial intermixture, then progressed to discuss the mixture of texts and language (as argued by Mikhail Bakhtin), and ultimately cultures (as argued by Homi Bhabha and Jacques Derrida). For more in-depth history on the concept see Canclini (1990), Hall (1992, 1993), Spivak (1987, 1988), and Gilroy (1993). See also Arturo Escobar (1995).

The definition of hybridity is heavily contested. In this chapter I use a loose definition of the term relevant to Postcolonial Studies. Hybridity, or cultural hybridization, can be defined as the appropriation and adaptation of norms from an existing society or group and mixing it with those of another society or group, which in turn forms a third new culture and identity. These exchanges and adoptions take place as a result of various circumstances, including imperialism, colonialism, globalism, immigration, among others. The content of new cultural forms includes language, social institutions, and cultural traditions. In the case of Gabon, hybridity occurred as a result of all of the aforementioned circumstances. The exposure to French culture and ideologies, the migration of Bantu groups, the accessibility of English worldwide, and the decreasing distance between nations have contributed to the cultural hybridization of Gabon.

Additionally, hybridity is not simply the appropriation of cultural norms, but can also function as a mechanism of resistance. For example, hybridity can be used to deny and repudiate assimilation previously forced during colonialism, and as a symbol of pride, to elevate the cultural identity of one's roots. Case in point, the fluency in French, English, or any other western language gained during colonialism is often used to create parallel narratives which in turn elevate the identities of marginalized nations.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Homi Bhabha argues that hybridity provides individuals “a place of translation: a place of hybridity” where the renegotiation of identities can take place. These descriptions effectively describe Gabon. The identities of Gabonese citizens are hybrid in nature, a hybridization that started prior to the colonial period but was reinforced during colonialism. The interactions with Europeans beginning in the fifteenth century contributed to a shift in self-perception. The colonization of

Gabon by France in the nineteenth century, which introduced a new language, education system, and culture further hybridized the identities of the inhabitants. As a result, the French influence present during and after colonialism and its influence on the self-perception of Gabon's population remains. Thus, while Gabonese inhabitants have an identity apart from France, the totality of it cannot be understood without taking into consideration the substantial French impact.

Language and Identity

A central dimension of identity formation involves language. To a large extent, language embodies the historical and sociopolitical facts of a society and culture. The language used by a person is entwined with social contexts and personal history. In his article, "'We Speak Eleven Tongues': Reconstructing Multilingualism in South Africa," Leketi Makalela describes the connection between language and identity by stating, "Beyond pedagogic and psychological reasons language is inextricably linked to identity, ideology, and power."¹⁶² In her book *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (1997), Christine Weedon connects the role of language to a person's individual and social identity. Weedon explains the relationship between language and identity by saying, "Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the

162. Leketi Makalela, "'We Speak Eleven Tongues': Reconstructing Multilingualism in South Africa," in *Languages of Instruction for African Emancipation: Focus on Postcolonial Contexts and Considerations*, ed. Birgit Brock-Utne et al. (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Mkuki n Nyota Publishers, 2005), 145-175.

place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed.”¹⁶³ Thus the language a person uses is inextricably tied to identity.

Language is similarly tied to social contexts, which in turn impacts on identity. Norman Fairclough explains this connection by describing discourse as being directly connected to social practice. He believes that discourse functions in a social manner based on socially determined contexts and their social effects, in which individuals interact. Fairclough posits that even when individuals are conscious of their own distinctiveness and believe themselves to be above social pressures, language is still used in ways that have been socially determined. He argues that language activity in social contexts not only reflects those contexts but also affects them. Fairclough explains the relationship between language and social contexts as follows: “People internalize what is socially produced and made available to them, and use this internalized MR [members’ resources] to engage in their social practice, including discourse.”¹⁶⁴ The expressions and language used by a person are context specific and socially determined.

Additionally, language is inextricably connected to the speaker just as the speaker is closely tied to his/her language. Bourdieu notes, “Speech always owes a major part of its value to the value of the person who utters it.”¹⁶⁵ Bourdieu is proposing that the weight and worth ascribed to speech (language) cannot be detached from the individual uttering it, just as the individual speaking cannot be understood apart from the

163. Christine Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Pub., 1997), 21.

164. Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (New York: Longman, 1989), 20-21.

165. Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*, 652.

sociocultural context in which the speech (language) takes place. A person's identity cannot be detached from his/her language or context.

Apart from influencing identity formation, language similarly determines the formation and reformation of social order. According to both Lev Vygotsky (1978) and Elinor Ochs (1996), language is used as a semiotic tool to (re)create an interlocutory environment. Thus, a person uses language to reproduce and reflect social forms or create new ones, (re)creating social environments. Therefore, the use of language as a tool for social order not only involves national challenges, but also individual challenges related to self-categorization and self-realization. The appropriations of social norms are revealed and released via language in social contexts.

Bonny Norton (2010) further expands on the concept of language and social contexts by proposing that language negotiates and renegotiates a sense of self and identity in relation to social environments, both local and national. An individual's identity is constantly reconstructed with changes in language; the change of language in various contexts in turn affects the identity of the person using it. Norton best summarizes the link between language and identity as follows.

It is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person gains access to or is denied access to powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak. Thus language is not conceived of as a neutral medium of communication, but is understood with reference to its social meaning.¹⁶⁶

Language is thus a gateway for identity formation in a culture.

166. Norton, *Identity and Language Learning*, 46.

Language and Identity as it relates to Gabon

Thus in Gabon language is tied to social identity and the speaker, and it shapes the perception of the self. Gabonese identities are reflected through language, through French and through other Gabonese languages. For many in Gabon, language denotes ethnicity, just as an individual's language is an indicator of identity. This strong connection between language and identity in Gabon is detailed by Rebecca A. Mitchell (2009). In a study performed in Gabon involving three ethnic groups (Punu, Fang, and Nzébi), Mitchell examines the sociolinguistic context of Gabon. Mitchell specifically focuses on the role of language in relation to speaker identities, education, language planning, and the social position of the French language. Her study reveals that some informants strongly linked their identity to their language:

The Fangs seem particularly aware of a link between language and ethnic identity: "if don't speak Fang, how can I call myself a Fang?" (Fang female). Adults tend to regard their cultural identity as an essential starting point for personal development: "first you need to understand where you come from" (Fang female); "it means I have a root, a base which I can build on" (Nzébi female). The Gabonese languages are considered to be an intrinsic part of this development: "our language is who we are, it allows us to know ourselves" (Nzébi male); "if you don't speak your language you're not a citizen" (Punu female)."¹⁶⁷

This strong tie to an ethnic language and identity is broken as a result of the use of French. Gabonese citizens perceive French as the reason for the dwindling presence and use of local languages and thus the loss of an ethnic identity. Although they see French as having contributed to the loss of their heritage, the Gabonese also see French as a necessary evil. Some participants believe there is no choice but to accept French as "society is ruled by French," says a Fang Male, and Gabonese citizens "can't manage

167. Mitchell, "Language, Education and Identity in Gabon," 131.

without it” because they were “colonized by the French,” says a Nzébi male.¹⁶⁸ Many also see the French language as a membership into the western world. Though there seems to be a reluctant acceptance of the language, Mitchell states that “the lingering colonial legacy that French embodies is for some informants the source of conflicts of ethno-cultural identity and the ignorance or even outright rejection of ethnic origins.”¹⁶⁹ Thus, the French language has altered their identities and self-perceptions. The Gabonese exhibit a hybrid culture and sense of self, one in which ethnic pride is either in conflict or in peace with French influence.

The identities of the Gabonese population are not only expressed through language, but are also affected by it. Since an individual cannot be understood apart from his/her language, Gabonese citizens cannot be understood apart from the French language. The influence of the French language in the country resulted in an identity shift, one from ethnic to national and international. In many people this shift also resulted in ignorance of ethnic identity and provoked the rejection of ethnic origins in favor of the French language. Mitchell’s study reveals that “very few informants invoked a shared national identity, and many also related more to a wider African identity than a narrower ethnic identity, especially children.”¹⁷⁰ One Punu female informant states “we find it hard to reconcile what comes from abroad with our culture,” and a Nzébi male reaffirms her statement by mentioning, “children today have almost lost their culture.”¹⁷¹

168. Mitchell, “Language, Education and Identity in Gabon,” 128.

169. Mitchell, “Language, Education and Identity in Gabon,” 129.

170. Mitchell, “Language, Education and Identity in Gabon,” 131.

171. Mitchell, “Language, Education and Identity in Gabon,” 129.

Similarly, the esteem ascribed to the French language during colonial times and a multiplicity of languages and populations in Gabon have contributed to its many statuses in Gabon. One such status is mother tongue. The fact that French is now a primary and only language for some youth means that the identity tied to language has shifted from ethnic to national. A person who only speaks French is closely tied to French as a language. A person who only speaks French sees the self through French. The conception of the world is fabricated through the French language. Identity is altered with the first contact of the language. This allows the person to create an identity much more focused on the national and international level where the French language is spoken while ethnic culture and language are minimized. The ethnic identity is replaced with a national and international identity.

The characteristics of *lingua franca* and mother tongue, and the prestige associated with the French language are reasons for its use and the loss of ethnic identities in Gabon. For many in urban areas and cities, French is the language most widely spoken both at home and outside of it. French is used in all social interactions and in all social contexts. The French language permeates daily life. This has allowed many to forsake their ethnic languages in favor of the “link” language.

Identity is impacted with a shift in language. The loss of ethnic languages as a result of the wide adoption of French has contributed to a shift in self-perception and self-categorization for some Gabonese citizens. This shift has allowed them to self-translate themselves in a way in which French is paramount. Likewise, the shift of perception makes them relate more to a French-centered perspective than a Gabonese one. The added influence of an educational system that is similar to that of France and in which

educational materials are French-focused further highlights how easily this sort of shift can occur.

Education and Identity

Identity formation is also interconnected with the social structure. One such structure is education. Studies have demonstrated that students adapt to their school environment while simultaneously going through experiences that affect their identities. Education impacts the personality of individuals by affecting critical thinking skills, the ability to problematize and conceptualize issues, and the perception of regional, national, and global environments.¹⁷² Theorists have also accepted that school experiences are paramount to the formation of selfhood because they affect self-concept, personal values, interests, and career goals. In “Self and Identity Processes in School Motivation, Learning, and Achievement” (2006), Robert Roeser, Stephen Peck, and Nailah Nasir argue, “Education, in its optimal form, also addresses enculturation and self-determination.”¹⁷³ Roeser, Peck, and Nasir indicate that education is a means used for students becoming “aware of and extricating themselves from habitual (automatic) ways of attending, perceiving, feeling, thinking, and doing” by encouraging and introducing new approaches to self-expression and self-identification.¹⁷⁴ Thus, education affects the thought process of students which in turn impacts their self-representation. Lyda

172. Hanoch Flum and Avi Kaplan, “Identity Formation in Educational Settings: A Contextualized View of Theory and Research in Practice,” *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 37 (2012): 240-45.

173. Robert Roeser, Stephen Peck, and Nailah Nasir, “Self and Identity Processes in School Motivation, Learning, and Achievement,” in *Handbook Educational Psychology*, ed. Patricia Alexander et al. (New York: Routledge, 2006): 392.

174. Roeser, Peck, and Nailah, “Self and Identity Processes in School Motivation, Learning, and Achievement,” 392.

See also Proshanta K. Nandi (1994) and Patti McGill Peterson (1971).

Lannegrand-Willems and Harke A. Bosma describe the identity development of adolescents in a school context as follows.

At school students have to make vocational choices, which are among the first important choices for them. Choices and decisions during adolescence lead to commitments, to the first signs of an achieved identity. The choices in the school sphere can be affirmative of one's identity.¹⁷⁵

The identity of a student is influenced and reaffirmed by choices, decisions, and experiences made inside the school context on various levels.

The impact of education on self and identity formation, according to Roeser, Peck, and Nasir, occurs on two levels: macro and micro.¹⁷⁶ Identity formation on the macro level focuses on schools as social institutions and organizations. As social institutions schools exist inside a "broader contextual, cultural, and societal structure" both at local and distal levels.¹⁷⁷ The local level refers to neighborhoods, communities, and school districts, and the characteristics associated with them such as values, administrative methods, social class, and resources. The distal level refers to broader pressures, national and international. At the distal level, schools exist inside cultural ideologies, state governance, and wider society issues such as cultural diversity and poverty, among others. The social and cultural structures present at both the local and distal levels affect education on a smaller scale, for example in classrooms.¹⁷⁸

175. Lyda Lannegrand-Willems and Harke A. Bosma, "Identity Development-in-Context: The School as Important Context for Identity Development," in *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research* 6 (2006): 85-113.

176. This concept of identity formation is based on "The Basic Model," a model used to understand self/identity in a school context.

177. Roeser, Peck, and Nasir, "Self and Identity Processes in School Motivation, Learning, and Achievement," 405.

178. Roeser, Peck, and Nasir, "Self and Identity Processes in School Motivation, Learning, and Achievement," 405.

As social organizations schools operate as part of an organizational culture and an administrative context.¹⁷⁹ The sociocultural aspect of an institution and the organizational culture and administrative context of an organization impact classrooms, which in turn directly influence students. The organizational and administrative contexts that impact on schools are “characteristics of school leaders and teaching staffs; the grade span; school size and sector; the school culture; and the school’s level of resources and infrastructure.”¹⁸⁰ These pressures affect students’ identity formation through teachers and their pedagogical practices in classrooms.

Identity formation in education on the micro level focuses on classrooms as spaces of social interaction. In classrooms, students act and interact with peers and teachers, and these interactions form part of the basis of their identities. The mechanisms of power found in the context of classrooms range from mode and language of instruction, rules and roles, curriculum and educational content, social class and ethnicity, and others. Roeser, Peck, and Nasir describe the importance of classrooms on identity formation as follows.

“Social environments such as classrooms are catalysts for self/identity development insofar as these settings invite, permit, or inhibit movement from more peripheral to more central forms of participation in activities and responsibilities over time.”¹⁸¹

On the micro level, classrooms are not the only spaces that influence identity. Interactions in other places such as hallways, lunchrooms, and bathrooms also impact on students’ identities. Interactions in these contexts provide students with experiences from

179. Roeser, Peck, and Nasir, 405.

180. Roeser, Peck, and Nasir, 405.

181. Roeser, Peck, and Nasir, 405.

which they construct their emotional perspectives and self-identifications. At both the macro and micro levels, positive and negative interactions affect students as well.

Positive environments foster positive self-representations and values, whereas negative environments foster negative self-identifications. Macro and micro levels inspire specific behaviors on the part of students and simultaneously shape their identities

Concisely stated, education shapes identity formation by affecting a person's development in various areas. Through education and by physically attending learning institutions, an individual's self-image, perception of the world, beliefs, values, interests, and ways of thinking are affected. The influence on identity occurs through different avenues, including educational content, program curriculum, peer interactions, social contexts, and ideologies of the institutions and the nation. In view of these considerations, it is safe to argue that Gabonese citizens' identities are influenced by the French language, French educational system, and the French focused educational content.

The continued use of French as the medium of instruction, the France-centered educational model, and the French-focused educational content has impacted and continues to impact Gabonese citizens' identities on a micro level. As detailed in chapter 2 and 4, the language of instruction in Gabon is the one *de jure* obtained during colonialism. Gabonese pupils are exposed to the language from childhood until adulthood. The use of French as a medium of instruction implies that students must master formal French, that is to say Parisian French. This impacts the identities of Gabonese citizens on micro and distal levels. It can be argued that France is not the only country that speaks French, thus arguing that Gabon's version of the language is similar

to Parisian French might seem irrelevant. The fact that Gabon's educational content is mostly produced in and by France, however, supports my position.

Additionally, consistent exposure to the language means that Gabonese pupils' personalities are affected by and translated through the French language. Gabon's educational model is still similar to that of France or, better stated, remains the one implemented during colonialism with changes adopted and/or introduced from France. Although new changes have been implemented in France's educational system in the last few years, the basic structure of both models is still similar. The similarity in educational models is contributing to the formation of a French-centered perspective by Gabonese pupils. Since language and social structures are paramount to the perception of the world and the sense of self, the use of a French-centered system and French as the medium of instruction are academically translating Gabonese citizens as members of an extension of France on the macro level.

In addition to the language of instruction and educational structure, the use of French-focused educational materials impacts the identity formation of the Gabonese populace. In chapter 4 we saw that school textbooks in Gabon are almost all produced by and in France. Geography books are written, manufactured, and produced in France. History materials are produced in France although some appear to have been written by African writers. French grammar books are assembled in France with a few exceptions. Some literature materials are written by French writers and others are written by African writers. Although the writers of literature differ, the books are still manufactured in France by French publishing houses or co-publishers. Depending on which books are used, the content ranges from extremely European and Franco-centric to African. With

the exception of primary education materials, civic books for secondary students are the only textbooks written, produced, and manufactured in Gabon.

Such heavy reliance by Gabon on an external presence to educate its populace has allowed France to affect the identities of Gabonese pupils on all four levels: distal, local, macro, and micro. The lack of change has also contributed to the persistent academic presence of France in Gabon. The persistent similarities in educational model and educational content have contributed to the encroachment of French culture on Gabonese culture academically. The aforementioned French influence is translating Gabonese people as a subordinate population of France. It is also allowing the Gabonese population to rewrite itself as a continuation of the former colonizer by way of education. The identities of Gabonese citizens are being filtered through the French language and an educational system that is French-centered in structure and content.

I am in no way implying that France is the only influence on Gabonese identities. This chapter has demonstrated that identity formation draws on various elements. What I am arguing is that French influence is an important component to be considered when analyzing what impacts on Gabonese identities. The role of France is only a part of the whole, though at times a vital part. Cultural hybridity allows for the coexistence of French influence and other components to form Gabonese citizens' self-categorizations. Although Gabonese citizens have identities apart from the legacies of France and colonialism, these identities cannot be understood without highlighting the extent of France's impact in Gabon and on Gabonese citizens.

Language, Education, and Identity

Independently, language and education affect identity formation. Combined, language *in* education proves paramount to the development of the self. In Gabon the combination of both is critical to the identities of pupils. The introduction of French in schools combined with a French-centered education result in the shift of ethnic identities and languages from a central position to a more peripheral status. The shift of identity is rendered permanent and consistently held because education starts early with *crèches* (nurseries) and ends at age 18 or 19. If higher education is pursued, France's impact on the identities of Gabonese students remains and grows stronger. The use of French during the numerous hours in school and the interactions thereafter with classmates in French perpetuates the use of the language and reduces the possibility of the use of local languages. As indicated in chapter 2, the French language holds many statuses in Gabon, two of which are primary language and "link" language. For many in cities, especially the capital city Libreville, French is the only language spoken. The fact that populous urban centers have people from different ethnicities and countries necessitates that French be used as a "link" language. For these reasons, interactions taking place in schools and outside of it are done in French. These interactions impact the development of the identities of the students. Their identities are translated through French and academically seen through a French educational model, less in a local language or mother tongue.

To conclude, the introduction of French, which to many is a second or third language, results in making French *the* language to speak. Ethnic languages assume the role of familial and habitual languages. This shift from ethnic language to French also means a shift in culture and identity, one seen and expressed through the French

language. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o addresses in his book *Decolonising the Mind*, language is a carrier of culture and a medium through which it is experienced. The use of a foreign language results in the alienation of an individual's own culture, identity, and language.¹⁸² This is the case in Gabon. The use of French in the educational system and the experience of going through a French-centered education alter and shape the identities of the Gabonese populace. This process involving the constant use of French, both socially and educationally, has contributed and will continue to contribute to the creation of a generation whose first and only language is French and whose identity is filtered through French. This means that academically and through language, Gabon will continue to indirectly perpetuate its position as an extension of France.

182. _Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Portsmouth, N.H: Heineman, 1986), 13.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

If my predictions are erroneous then Gabon will be able to reject French influence and project a stronger Gabonese presence via the use of local languages and curriculum reforms. If my projections are inaccurate, Gabon will distance itself from France and in turn create an image completely independent from the former colonizer. If I am mistaken, Gabon's history will not reflect its future. And if I am wrong, Gabon will indeed finally gain its independence, not just figuratively.
Moussavou Froy Batsielilit

Related to various concepts that address the impact of language and education on identity formation, the chapters in this thesis discuss the effect of French colonization on the self-perception of Gabonese citizens. The chapters also show the progress or lack thereof made after independence and how such a climate has contributed to current linguistic, educational, and personal conditions in Gabon. Although not explicitly described in the thesis, theories from the field of translation studies and the notion of identity formation, including that of author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, have shaped the framework of this work. Concepts such as cultural translation, postcolonialism, domestication and foreignization, cultural borrowing, and globalization in translation demonstrate that France has and continues to influence Gabonese citizens' sense of self.

Translation Studies Concepts

The idea of cultural translation including work by Itamar Even-Zohar (1978) and Gideon Toury (1980) focuses on the relationship between culture and translation. Particularly, it focuses on the impact of culture on translation within the framework of history, context, and ideology. Postcolonialism, as discussed by Gayatri Spivak (1993), examines the power relation between different entities in which translation, language, and literature play a role. Postcolonial theory suggests that translation, textual and cultural,

contribute to the colonization of cultures and participate in the promulgation of a specific definition of what colonized groups are. Spivak uses the dichotomy of the colonizer and colonized as a metaphor to explain the power relation present during and after colonialism. In her view, the colonized individuals are presented as inferior imitations whose identities and selves have been greatly altered by the colonizers. The theories of domestication and foreignization, discussed by Venuti (1999), introduce the viewpoint that appropriation and visibility of foreign elements in a target culture is preferable to the complete manipulation of the foreign into an unrecognizable domestic form. The idea of cultural borrowing addresses the practice of incorporating verbatim expressions from a source text into a target language without cultural adaptation. Finally, the notion of globalization in translation highlights the phenomenon of western languages such as English and French becoming the linking languages in Third World countries.

When observed abstractly in relation to Gabon and its French colonization, these issues are crucial to the understanding of Gabon's current linguistic and educational situation and effects. My understanding of these concepts has expanded the ways I perceive the history of Gabon. They shape my awareness of the consequences of prioritizing and using French to the detriment of Gabonese languages. The theories of translation studies in relation to language, culture, literature, and identity highlight the significance of colonial socialization and appropriation. In the context of Gabon, they underline the high esteem for France and the French language, the fear of separation from France both educationally and socially, and the disregard of Gabon and its languages. A summary of the major points discussed throughout the thesis is found below.

The French Language in Gabon

Various research areas, explicit and implicit, are raised in this thesis. One such question is whether or not there is a French authority in Gabon. A subsequent question is, if a French presence and influence exist in Gabon, how do they affect the population? As demonstrated, there is indeed a French authority in Gabon, one evident in the use of the French language and in Gabon's educational system and educational materials, as well as areas beyond the scope of this thesis. The French language and educational model are remnants of the colonial rule, a period that lasted from the 1830s until Gabon's independence in 1960.

Inherited from France, the use of French as the official language of Gabon and the linguistic situation in Gabon have yet to change (except with the addition of English as the second official language in 2012) for various reasons. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, local languages were used as religious and familial languages. This practice continued after independence and to the present, with a few exceptions. In some instances local languages are introduced in private classes and certain media outlets use local languages as the medium of communication. These contexts are the results of private initiatives and not solutions initiated by the government. The overall situation remains the same: French is *the* language and local languages have been relegated to the periphery. As detailed in Chapter 3, the fabricated relationship between language and power, or at the very least an association, created during colonial rule by France in order to construct an extension of itself has contributed to the continued use of French in Gabon today.

The Continued Existence of French in Gabon

The sustained authority of French in Gabon can be attributed to the impossibility of elevating a local language to national status, a lack of a standardized writing system, French acting as a linking language, and the benefits gained from France's involvement. First, one could argue that given the multiplicity of languages in Gabon as discussed in Chapter 2, the necessity for French would diminish as it has in some African countries. This does not appear to be the case for Gabon. It is improbable that a local language will become national. The lack of nationalization and the absence of formal recognition of local languages have retarded the ability of any of them to be formally institutionalized as an official language in the country.

In addition, the absence of a standardized writing system further contributes to the government's inability to replace French and elevate national languages. Gabonese languages have been typographically recorded using various writing systems during the colonial period and after independence. According to Daniel Idiata, four writing systems have been introduced: Raponda Walker's (1932) system; the Scientific Alphabet of the Languages of Gabon published by the University Laboratory of Oral tradition (LUTO 1990); the new alphabet of Gabonese languages adopted in 1999; and the *Rapidolangu* method.¹⁸³ Despite the four techniques established, a uniform writing system for local languages has yet to be agreed upon by the government.

Along with the deficit of a homogeneous writing system, the culmination of urbanization, interethnic marriages, and migration contribute to the persistent dominance

183. Daniel Idiata, *The Challenge of Using African Languages at School: A Case Study of Gabonese Project of Introducing Vernacular Languages at School* (Cape Town, South Africa: Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society [CASAS], 2006), 113.

of the French language in Gabon. Gabon has linguistic diversity, not linguistic dominance. This means that although there are multiple languages in the country, some with substantial numbers of speakers, no single vernacular language truly has dominance. As such French is acting as a linking language, keeping French alive in the country. The necessity for a linking language adds to the impossibility of the removal and erasure of French in Gabon.

Additionally, the economic and social benefits gained from France have overshadowed any desire to repudiate a colonial identity. Economically, we have seen that France remains Gabon's biggest debt payer and main financial partner, as well as foster economic growth. The involvement of French nationals in Gabon's business sector contributes to the development of the country's economy. Socially, France participates in the development of social institutions such as education by furnishing resources and materials through various avenues and by providing monetary aid. These diverse reasons have contributed to the lackluster initiative of the Gabonese government to institute changes that would distance itself from France and the French language.

Gabon's Attempt and Failure to Distance Itself from France in Education

The educational system and educational materials used in Gabon have experienced a few changes in recent years, although none drastic enough to render them dissimilar from those of France. After independence Gabon ostensibly elected to distinguish itself from being another French colonized state by recapturing its identity. This was done by attempting to Africanize and Gabonize its curriculums. The fear of exclusion from French institutions of higher education and the possibility of creating distance between Gabon and France contributed to the inability of the initiative to take

root. At present the Africanization and Gabonization of the educational materials are visible but limited.

Except for textbooks in primary education and a couple in secondary education, the process of localizing the curriculum to reflect the socio-political climate of pupils has not been realized. As detailed in Chapter 4, the majority of the books used are manufactured in and by France, with a couple by other African nations. The fact that Gabon's textbooks are mainly imported from and provided by France results in similarity in content and structure. Except for civics books manufactured by Gabon and a few literature books, most materials do not reflect the cultural heritage of Gabon; they highlight that of France. As we recognize the continued presence of France in Gabon's educational system and materials, we can ask why has nothing changed?

The reasons for the lack of extensive changes could be attributed to neocolonialism and Gabon's inability to self-govern without the aid of France, an ineffective government, and an underdeveloped publishing industry which is the direct result of prioritizing the importation of French educational materials. Gabon has relied on France for much of its development during and after colonialism. The dependent relationship between Gabon and France, which some do categorize as neocolonialism, resulted in France influencing various areas in Gabon including the economy, the military, the government, and especially education. As demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, an intimate educational relationship was created between the countries which guaranteed the acceptance of Gabonese citizens in French higher institutions of learning. The reliance on France for academic development and for the advancement of educational programs ensured permanent trade agreements and financial aid that permitted France to

control and fulfill Gabon's educational needs. Thus, the relationship resulted in the creation of a Gabonese system more similar to that of its former colonizer.

In addition to relying on France for scholastic necessities, the lack of development in Gabon can also be viewed as a result of poor wealth management and misappropriation of funds. Gabon is rich but its people are poor. Gabon has a population of 1.7 million and a GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of \$34 billion (CIA World Factbook 2014 est.). This level of wealth would dictate that a country should be able to sustain such a small population very well, but this is not the case in Gabon. In addition to the poor management of revenue and funds, the presidential family and "close" associates are alleged to have stolen billions of francs since the induction of Omar Bongo, Gabon's second president, in 1967. For several years, Gabon has been under investigation for corruption and embezzlement by France and the U.S, but the assumption of corruption has been around since the 1990s, if not earlier. As a result, Gabon has accrued far more debt than necessary, which has contributed to a lack of social development, including the expansion of an educational publishing industry.

Ironically the absence of progress in the educational publishing industry in Gabon can also be attributed to international cooperation, subsidies, and the distribution of book supplies. As discussed in Chapter 4, Gabon and France have multiple cooperation agreements in various sectors, including education. These agreements, along with subsidies and book supplies—both forms of social aid meant to help alleviate the burden of textbook purchase—determine where and from whom Gabon acquires educational materials for its students. The negative aspect of agreements, subsidies, and book supplies however is the failure to help develop in-country publishing. By favoring the

import of textbooks, Gabon did not prioritize itself as a provider of education, hence allowing France to extend its presence and influence in Gabon.

The French Presence in Gabon and its Impact on Gabonese Identities

The persistent use of a Franco-centric educational model and French-focused materials directly contribute to French culture being superimposed onto Gabonese culture via education. The lack of self-representation in educational materials forces French ideals on Gabon's population. As a result, the Gabonese populace is indirectly contributing to its own rewriting by continuing to favor its former colonizer. As detailed in Chapter 5, the French language and the French-centered academic structure in Gabon has shifted the identity of Gabonese citizens from an ethnic level to national and international ones.

This is not to say that all Gabonese identities are mainly shaped by France. As seen in Chapter 5, the components of a person's identity involve numerous systems. Thus the components of a Gabonese identity are partly constituted by ethnic pride, oral culture and heritage, and other factors that are native. Gabonese identities are hybrid in nature. Nonetheless French authority through education and the continued dominance of the French language are important elements that must be recognized.

The Implications of a French Presence or Lack Thereof in Gabon

Faced with the findings and observations described above and earlier, what does this mean for Gabon in the future? Will the French influence persist? If yes, what does this mean for Gabonese citizens' self-perception and identities? If no, which influences will become strong? Unless substantial changes are introduced, the status quo will persist. The culmination of all the issues discussed in this thesis provides a clear image of what the

future will hold. Nothing seems to indicate that any drastic changes to the educational model and educational content will be made. In view of my predictions that nothing will change, French influence will continue in Gabon.

Although Ali Bongo, Gabon's current president, has decried any further exclusive agreements between Gabon and France, history and recent events have yet to prove him sincere. As can be observed from the image below, Gabon's history with France is much too long for it to end abruptly. The image below is from a documentary focusing on France's relations with former colonies, with Gabon's second president as the only African president listed. It showcases why French influence will persist in Gabon.¹⁸⁴



Figure 4: FRANCAFRIQUE- documentary of France's neocolonialism.

The consistent presence and influence of France will result in an increase of Gabonese identities shifting among younger generations. As parental languages further decrease in use and inactive speakers diminish, French will remain as the official and “link” language. The constant use of French will then precipitate an increased shift of

184. Françafrigue, directed by Patrick Benquet (2010, Paris, France: Compagnie des Phares et Balises), TV Series.

self-categorization from ethnic to national and international. The lack of development and establishment of a Gabonese presence in education assure that pupils learn more about the outside world, especially France, than about Gabon. Ultimately, the Gabonese population will remain an extension of France through self-translation and self-censorship in education. This will take place both linguistically and academically, as can be seen currently.

If there is no French presence in the future, what influence will prevail? If my predictions are erroneous then Gabon will be able to reject French influence and project a stronger Gabonese presence via the use of local languages and curriculum reforms. If my projections are inaccurate, Gabon will distance itself from France and in turn create an image largely independent from that of the former colonizer. If I am mistaken, Gabon's history will not foreshadow its future. If I am wrong, Gabon will indeed finally gain its independence, not just figuratively. Unfortunately, nothing currently projects such a future.

What Translation Can Bring to Gabon

Since nothing projects a different future than the past and present in Gabon, what could be an agent for change for the future? Translation could be the lynchpin needed to bring about a significant transformation. In the context of the written text, translation could decrease cultural and linguistic gaps, act as an “intercultural mediator,”¹⁸⁵ and promote the use and recognition of Gabonese languages in education and society, and by the government. Familial languages are still used by many to communicate, especially

185. Anna Bernacka, “The Importance of Translation Studies for Development Education,” *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review* 14 (2012): 113-18.

those in rural towns. The lack of materials in these mother tongues contributes to the misunderstanding of groups and communities, thus fostering cultural and linguistic ignorance and feelings of resentment. It is true that attempts have been made by professionals to create content in some Gabonese languages and that certain oral languages lack a written form. But the translation of current languages, those with content and writing forms, would provide knowledge about unfamiliar languages, increase interethnic communications, and foster a climate of acceptance and understanding of present cultures in Gabon whose histories remain incomplete. Similarly, translation in postcolonial Gabon can function as a cultural mediator, bringing about political and social change, reconciliation among different ethnic groups, and potential social integration of those not able to navigate the French language. Finally, translation would promote the use of Gabonese languages in education and society while forcing the government to recognize and protect those languages as viable options for the dissemination of information. In this context translation would promote generations of Gabonese language speakers and allow for multilingual discourse in accordance with the reality of language diversity found in Gabon.

In the context of self-perception, the mainstream use of Gabonese languages in education and society would encourage many to revisit what defines their identities. As seen in this thesis, the translation and definition of one's self is inextricably connected to language. The adoption of French ideals and language in Gabon resulted in hybrid identities, the result and process of directionality of language and cultural adaptation during and after colonialism. The translation and wide use of Gabonese languages would increase exposure to those native tongues and create a stronger sense of self and identity

not rooted alone in the French language but also in those of a person's ancestors.

Translation in Gabon in its current postcolonial status would result in a sense of empowerment and pride about the local and national history rather than its subjugation and assimilation.

APPENDIX A

EDUCATIONAL ACRONYMS AND LANGUAGE FAMILIES

Table 2: Educational Acronyms

Acronym	French	English
ACCT		
BAC	Baccalauréat	Baccalaureate/ Exit Exam
BEP	Brevet d'Études Professionnelles	Certificate of Professional Studies
BEPC	Brevet d'études du Premier Cycle	Junior High School Diploma
BT	Brevet de Technicien	Technician Certificate
BTA	Brevet d'Agricole	Agricultural Technician Certificate
BTS	Brevet de Technicien Supérieur	Advanced Technician Certificate
CAP	Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle	Certificate of Professional Competence
CAPC	Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat des collèges	Secondary School Teaching Certificate
CAPCET	Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat des collèges d'Enseignement Technique	Secondary School Teaching Certificate for Technical Track
CAPES	Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement Secondaire	Secondary School Teaching Certificate for High School
CAPLT	Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat des Lycées Technique	Secondary School Teaching for Technical High School
CE	Classe du Cours Élémentaire	Elementary School Course
CFP	Certificat de Formation Professionnelle	Vocational Training Certificate
CM	Cours Moyen	Middle-level Course(s)
CP	Cours Préparatoire	Preparatory Course(s)
CPGE	Les Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Écoles	Preparatory Classes for Top-ranking Higher Education Institutes
DESS	Diplôme d'Études Supérieure Spécialisées	Specialized Graduate Diploma
DEUST	Diplôme d'Études Universitaires Scientifiques et Techniques	Scientific and Technological University Degree
DNB	Diplôme Nationale du Brevet	Certificate of Completion of Junior High
DNTS	Diplôme Nationaux de Technologie Spécialisées	National Diploma of Specialized Technology
DUEE	Diplôme Universitaire d'Études Économiques	University Diploma of Economic Studies
DUEJ	Diplôme Universitaire d'Études Juridiques	University Diploma in Legal Studies

DUEL	Diplôme Universitaire d'Études Littéraires	University Diploma in Literary Studies
DUES	Diplôme Universitaire d'Études Scientifiques	University Diploma in Scientific Studies
DUT	Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie	University Diploma in Technology
EDICEF	Editions Classiques d'Expression Française	Editions of Classics French Expression
EDIG	Éducation Nationale par les Éditions Gabonaises	Education by the Gabonese Editions
ENS	L'école Normale Supérieure	Technical Training School
ENSE	L'école Normale Supérieure de l'Enseignement technique	Advanced Technical Teachers Training School
HL	Hachette Livre	Hachette Livre
HLI	Hachette Livre International	Hachette Livre International
IPAM	Institut Pédagogique Africain et Malgache	African and Malagasy Pedagogical Institute
LMD	License, Master, Doctorat	License/Bachelor, Master, Doctorate
STS	Les Sections de Techniciens Supérieures	Advanced Technicians Sections

Kwenzi-Mikala's ten language families:

- Mazuna group: Fan-Atsi, Fan-Make, Fan-Mvaï, Fan-Ntumu, Fan-Nzaman, Fan-Okak;
- Myene group: Enenga, Ghalwa, Mpongwe, Nkomi, Orungu , Okoa;
- Mekana-Menaa group: Akele, Ungom, Lisighu, Mbanwe, Metombolo, Seki, Tumbidi, Shake, Wumpfu, Lendambomo;
- Mekona-Mangote group: Ikota, Benga, Shamayi, Mahongwe, Ndasha, Bakola;
- Membe (or Okande-Tsogho) group: Ghetsogho, Ghepinzi, Kande, Ghevovhe, Ghehimbaka, Ghevhiya, Ebongwe, Kota-kota;
- Merye group: Ghisira, Ghivharama, Ghivhungu, Yipunu, Yilumbu, Yisangu, Ngubi, Civili, Yirimba, Yighama;
- Metye group: Yinzebi, Yitsengi, Yimwele, Yivhili, Liduma, Liwanzi, Yibongo;
- Membere group: Lembaama, Lekanini, Lindumu, Lateghe, Latsitseghe;
- Mekana group: Bekwil, Shiwa (or Makina), Mwesa;
- Baka group: Baka.

APPENDIX B

ETHNIC POPULATIONS, FOREIGN LANGUAGES, AND SCHOOL ENROLLMENT IN GABON

Baka (5700)/ Baka	Hausa (10000)/ Hausa	Minduumo (5029)/ Nduma: Epigi, Kanandjoho, Kuya, Nyani	Seki (5200)/ Seki
Bakwele (5858)/Bakwel	Kande (2000)/ Kande	Miyangho (8300)/ Yangho	Sighu (1800)/ Sighu
Barama (11000)/ Barama	Kaningi (11000)/ Kaningi	Myene (62000)/ Mpongwe, Ajumba, Enenga, Galwa, Nkomi	Simba (5500)/ Simba
Benga (2390)/ Benga	Kele (13000)/ Kili	Ndasa (3500)/ Ndasa	Tsangi (12000)/ Tsaangi
Bhubhi (9100)/ Bubi & Getsogo	Kota (46000)/ Kota	Ngom (11000)/ Ngom	Tsogo (23000)/ Getsogo
Duma (14000)/ Duma & Njebi	Lumbu (53780)/ Lumbu	Teke (148000)/ Teke, Niningi, Tegekali	Vili (5000)/ Vili
Eshira (52500)/ Sira & Punu	Mahongwe (4875)/ Mahongwe	Nzebi (139000)/ Njebi	Vumbu (15537)/ Vumbu
Fang (680000)/ Fang: Make, Ntum, Ogoe	Mbaama (34500)/ Ombamba	Pinji (9300)/ Pinji	Wandji (15000)/ Wandji
Fon (19000)/ Fon	Mbahouin (5100)/ Mbangwe	Punu (170000)/ Punu	Wolof (8500)/ Wolof
Fulani (8400)/ Adamawa Fulfulde	Mbede (103381)/ Mbere	Sake (3346)/ Sake	Wumbvu (25000)/ Wumbvu
Gun (17000)/ Gun	Mbwisi (1700)/ Bwisi	Sangu (29000)/ Sangu	Yongho (44500)/ Yaka

Table 3: Present ethnic groups in Gabon with population numbers

Country of Origin	Languages	Mostly Spoken in
Angola	Ngola	Libreville
Benin	Adja, Fon, Nago, Watchi	Franceville, Lambaréné, Libreville, Mouila, Port-Gentil, Tchibanga
Cameroon	Aghehmwun, Bafia, Bamileke, Bamun, Bassa, Batanga, Beti, Bulu, Dwala, Eton, Finge, Hausa, Kako, Laka, Mckaa, Sango	Bitam, Lambaréné, Libreville, Minvoul, Oyem, Port-Gentil
Congo-Brazzaville	Kako, Kikongo, Laari, Mboshi, Lingala	Franceville, Libreville, Mayumba, Ndéndé, Tchibanga
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Kisakata, Kiswahili, Lingala, Pende, Tetela, Zande	Libreville, Port-Gentil
Equatorial Guinea	Bubi	Bitam, Libreville, Oyem
Ghana	Ashanti Banda, Eve Finge, Laka	Libreville, Port-Gentil
Guinea-Conakry	Haalpulaar, Manding	Libreville, Port-Gentil
Ivory Coast	Bawule, Ebrie, Nyagafulu	Libreville, Port-Gentil
Mali	Bambara, Malinke, Sarakole, Sonraï	Franceville, Lambaréné, Libreville, Mouila, Port-Gentil, Tchibanga
Nigeria	Buna, Hausa, Igbo, Laka, Yoruba	Libreville, Port-Gentil
Republic of Central Africa	Banda, Kako, Laka, Ngola, Sango	Libreville
Rwanda	Kinyarwanda	Libreville, Franceville
Sao Tomé and Príncipe	Creole	Libreville, Port-Gentil
Senegal	Haapulaar, Manding, Sossamahi, Wolof	Franceville, Lambaréné, Libreville, Mouila, Port-Gentil, Tchibanga
Togo	Fon, Kotokoli, Mina, Watchi	Libreville, Lambaréné, Port-Gentil

Table 4: Foreign African Languages in Gabon

Year	Primary School Enrollments	Secondary and Technical School Enrollments	Students on Scholarship in France
1945-1946	9082	—	—
1950-1951	21248	485	—
1957-1958	39763	1025	—
1959-1960	50545	2036	—
1965-1966	79112	5599	—
1971-1972	105600	11120	560

Table 5: School enrollment in Gabon from 1945-1972

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